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On Taking our Sources Seriously: Servius and the Theatrical Life of Vergil's *Eclogues*

Dicitur autem ingenti favore a Vergilio esse recitata, adeo ut, cum eam postea Cytheris meretrix cantasset in theatro, quam in fine Lycoridem vocat, stupefactus Cicero, cuius esset, requireret. (Servius, *ad Verg. Ecl.* 6.11; text in Thilo-Hagen 3.1: 66)

[*Eclogues* 6] is also said to have been recited by Virgil with enormous success, to such a degree that, when afterward the courtesan Cytheris, whom he lastly calls Lycoris, had sung it in the theater, the astonished Cicero asked whose it was. (tr. Putnam in Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 165)

Setting the Scene

Vergil needs no introduction to any participant in Western culture. He is, as T. S. Eliot memorably put it in his Presidential Address to the Vergil Society of 1944, “the classic of all Europe,”¹ “in a position which no other poet can share or usurp.”² Compared to his iconic status and long cultural *durée*, the glamorous *demi-mondaine* by the name of Volumnia Cytheris is for us a shadowy figure at best, relegated to the obscure corridors of ancient learning.³ Even the general classicist needs copious help in order to piece disparate fragments of knowledge together, and only the specialist in Roman history,

¹ Eliot 1957 [1944]: 70.

² *Ibid.* 68.

³ See most importantly Keith 2011; cf. Traina 2001.

literature and culture of the first century B.C.E. would be able to reel off with confidence her links with some of the recognizable, big names of the time: Mark Antony, Cornelius Gallus, who immortalized her in poetry under the name Lycoris, and the more obscure P. Volumnius Eutrapelus, whose freedwoman she was.⁴ Yet on one reported occasion in Republican cultural history, the alleged theatrical rendition of Vergil's sixth *Eclogue* referred to by the late antique (fifth century C.E.) grammarian Servius in the extract quoted above, the balance between fame and anonymity appears reversed: the star attraction is not Vergil but Cytheris/Lycoris; the poet himself can only be, as it were, coaxed out of the shadows by means of the attention of a political and intellectual grandee, his curiosity sufficiently aroused by an electrifying alliance of poetic text and performative enunciation.

Not surprisingly, the veracity of the incident related by Servius is hotly contested, with opinions ranging from the utterly positive (“it is not easy to see why these late sources should have invented the idea”)⁵ to the utterly dismissive (“a fascinating but almost entirely fictional anecdote”),⁶ with varying shades of endorsement (including tacit

⁴ For Cytheris' life/career, see below **p. x.**

⁵ Wiseman 2008a: 216; cf. Wiseman 1985a: 128; Panayotakis 2008: 191: “not a figment of Servius' imagination.”

⁶ Zetzel 1984: 141; cf. Barchiesi 2001: 288, citing Servius' scholion as an example of “pseudo-evidence . . . about poetry being performed in theaters”; more mildly, Höschele 2013: 49: “it strikes me as more likely that the entire incident is the product of a biographer's imagination, intriguingly bringing together the rising literary star of the

acceptance) in between.⁷ The rhetoric was recently stepped up with Holt Parker (2009: 201n53) provocatively stating:

Any modern scholar capable of believing this farrago (Cicero in the theater with Cytheris, Cicero having to ask who the author of the *Eclogues* might be, . . .) will believe anything.

To complicate matters further, there is a chronological impossibility involved. Cicero's presence becomes an insuperable stumbling block if the episode is positioned (though it need not be) in the aftermath of the publication of the *Eclogues* in book form,⁸ as opposed

Augustan age with a notorious *femme fatale* as well as the most acclaimed author of the late Republic, who immediately recognizes the youth's brilliance.”

⁷ See, e.g. Goldberg 2005: 47, who states that “... Vergil's *Eclogues* would be set to music and performed in the theater,” taking Servius among those “attesting” to the stage performance (*ibid.* n64). Cf. Beacham 2005: 164 (Servius “asserting” the stage adaptation of the sixth *Eclogue*); cf. Beacham 1999: 138.

⁸ See, e.g. Zetzel 1984: 141: “Cicero was dead by the end of 43, and we may doubt whether he ever met Virgil, much less listened to Cytheris reciting the *Eclogues*”; cf. Stok 2010: 115; Breed 2006: 171 n51. Coleman 1977: 18 positions *Eclogues* 6 and 10 with certainty “to the years after 39 BC”; cf. *ibid.* 15. The question of the entire book's year of publication is bound to remain open. For Coleman 1977: 18 “the early years of the Principate seem the most likely period”; Following the dating of *Eclogue* 8 in Tarrant 1978, Harrison 2007: 34n2 dates the *Eclogues* to 38 B.C.E.

to some earlier point during their gestation⁹ and completion as individual pieces (though, even then, it is debatable how far back we can reasonably go to coincide with Cicero's lifetime).¹⁰ Given the ease with which Servius' story can be dismissed as a “dubious tale” (Ross 2014: 770), is further scholarly engagement with it pointless?

There is no denying that the limit of what can be known with cast iron certainty has already been reached and that this limit amounts to . . . nothing at all. Moreover, whichever way one looks at the existing evidence (§2-3), there is no single secure, bullet-proof attestation of any stage performance of the *Eclogue(s)* either during Vergil's own lifetime or more broadly in the Augustan period.¹¹ Even so, it is imprudent to dismiss

⁹ A modern example here could be sought in the lifetime of Dickens, who saw many of his novels adapted and produced on the Victorian stage *before* he had even finished writing their last instalment.

¹⁰ See Clausen 1994: xxii: “Individual eclogues were doubtless shown or given to friends as they were written”; cf. Coleman 1977: 15: “[i]t is reasonable to suppose that the poems were first published individually or in pairs, each with a title and a dedication.” Nothing can preclude that some embryonic form of what eventually became *Eclogue* no 6 in the completed volume had been composed and circulated at a much earlier date; what we know as the sixth *Eclogue* may be a heavily revised version, exquisitely polished in order to bear the programmatic weight it carries in its ultimate significant place in the finished collection.

¹¹ Yet stage-representation of the *Eclogues* is often taken for granted. See, e.g. Martindale 1997: 119: “. . . performed on stage as miniature dramas” (no sources given); cf. Morgan 2000: 365 (without mention of Cytheris); Fantham 2013: 108 on Vergil's fame

Servius' comment altogether. There are more imaginative ways of making it work for us with a view to catching a better glimpse of what Bourdieu would call “the field of cultural production” in first-century B.C.E. Rome. The way suggested in the present piece begins with the mere shifting of the focus of inquiry from the strictly historical question “*did it happen?*” to questions that could shed light not on the particulars of

having possibly begun “as early as the 30s when his *Eclogues* were dramatized and performed”. For Lowrie 2009: 83 too “Vergil's *Eclogues* were performed as mime” (Servius among the evidence cited n.78); cf. *ibid.*: 13 on “the mime productions of Vergil's *Eclogues*” understood as “performances after the fact and not intrinsically part of the literature as one could argue for drama” (*ibid.*: 13). Virgilian appropriation of mime tropes to create the *Bucolics* is assumed by van Sickle 2011: 33, while Dupont 2010: 462 seems to go furthest in this direction, relying on Servius to claim that “Vergil ... writes scripts for mime, which were *in fact* played in theatres (Servius, on *Ecl.* 6.11). ... The *Eclogues* ... were composed at the same time for the theatre” (my emphasis); cf. Dupont 1997: 52, stating as fact that “There, at least, [sc. in the theater] in order to make the text more pleasurable to the audience, actors, singers, and dancers are employed, as was the case with the performance of Virgil's *Bucolics*.” A strong case for the overall performative value of the *Eclogues* is made by Habinek 2005 who, in line with his general privileging of performance over writing in Rome, understands “the *ludus* of the *Eclogues*” as “a play of the body as much as of the voice” and (without including Servius) takes into account pointers of “[e]xternal evidence for the impersonation on stage of characters from the *Eclogues*” (136). Cf. Breed 2006: 5 (Servius *ad Ecl.* 6.11 is among the supporting sources cited at 159n9 but then summarily dismissed at 171n51).

people or occasions but, more broadly, on the endlessly intriguing interface of élite and popular culture. In the first place, once the primary offensive element, Cicero's presence, is removed, it would repay attention to revisit the very heart of the story, the convergence between élite poetry and the world of professional stage-artists, exemplified here by Vergil's *Eclogues* and Volumnia Cytheris respectively. If an occasion *could* have plausibly¹² arisen in the second half of the first century B.C.E. during which the creation of a non dramatic poet lived, albeit fleetingly, a life on the public¹³ stage; if, moreover, such a creation was performed by a notorious *diva* in the close circle of a male poet (Gallus) of the literary avant-garde, how could we best begin to make sense of this cultural hodge-podge? To pose the question somewhat differently: what could the existence of such a confluence mean for our ability to reconstruct some of the nodes of

¹² Plausibility is a parameter in Horsfall 1995a: 17: although the source of Servius' anecdote “is not clear,” “the detail in itself is entirely credible.”

¹³ This paper is only concerned with the plausibility of Servius' reference to a performance taking place in a *public* theatrical venue, such as, e.g., the theater of Pompey in Rome; I am not considering here the alternative scenario of “private theatricals” in, say, a villa's private entertainment space. Cf. Kuttner 1999: 109, who imagines “how Virgil's Sixth Eclogue looked when performed by the famous *mima* Volumnia Cytheris ... surely with balletic action before a diorama backdrop,” such as can be seen on several Pompeian painted walls with Dionysiac landscapes full of satyrs and nymphs. Despite the *faux pas* of a tacit conversion of Servius' information into fact (“when performed”), the proposition is in itself eminently plausible.

interaction between elegant, sophisticated, erudite literary production and mass entertainment in the twilight of the Roman Republic?

Section §1 attempts to cut through, identify and disentangle a nexus of prejudices which have led to the devaluing of Servius' information. The sidelining and dismissal of this piece of evidence, I argue, has more to teach us about our own culturally entrenched and discipline-inherited assumptions, stereotypes and pigeon-holing exercises than about what *could* have happened in late Republican Rome. **Sections §2-3** revisit the evidence on the performative enunciation of parts of the Vergilian corpus, as recitation or fully-fledged stage spectacle; most importantly, I emphasize that modulation of literary works to a performative key was certainly not unheard of in late Republican/Augustan Rome. Some poets welcomed it (Ovid), others shrank from it in horror and disgust (Horace), but it was fully consonant with a burgeoning theatrical industry in constant need of material to satisfy the Roman public's insatiable lust for spectacle and innovation. If Cytheris did perform a theatricalized version of Vergil's sixth *Eclogue*, she would have been doing nothing different from the *cantores* who (again unverifiably) took the *Eclogues* to the stage, the dancers who “danced” Ovid's “poems” or the singers who seem to have been rummaging bookstalls in search of appropriate, stage-worthy matter. Our texts are eloquent enough — we simply have seldom asked of them the most appropriate questions. **Section §4** turns the spotlight on the ‘go-betweens,’ the ‘brokers’ who, like modern screen-play writers adapting a novel for TV or film consumption, catalyzed elite literary production for wider use. Cultural amphibians, like the erudite Crassicius Pansa, who helped in the mime industry; pantomime librettists or even, according to Lucian (*Salt.* 74), pantomimes themselves in search of mythical material congenial to the

pantomime mode, are particularly relevant in this context.¹⁴ Cytheris' possible performance of a repertoire that happens to coincide with the mythological core of pantomime dancing in its artistic maturity opens pivotal questions about what Plutarch aptly calls the “full association and mutual entanglement” (κοινωνία πᾶσα καὶ μέθεξις ἀλλήλων) between the arts of poetry (ποιητική) and dance (ὀρχηστική) (*Mor.*748a). Most importantly, it raises the possibility that, in its remarkably protracted period of gestation,¹⁵ pantomime dancing, to a large extent an Eastern import into Roman life, completed a long and fruitful apprenticeship in the laboratories of neoteric verse. If Cytheris created a bodily ‘text’ out of that most Hellenistic of Vergil's bucolic creations, a new artistic map is being fleshed out before our very eyes: the work of some (possibly gifted) female stage-artists is seen to mesh and intersect, possibly in profound and influential ways, with ‘modernist’ trends in poetic composition, such as the progressive infusion of Roman poetry with Callimachean ideals, a process which had reached a high-water mark with Catullus and the ‘neoterics’ but was still (or even more) productively at work in Vergil's generation.

What this piece will *not* do is pretend that we are in a position to provide definitive answers to the problems raised by Servius' story, including the degree of cultural capital potentially associated with prominent female entertainers in Rome of the first century

¹⁴ Inspired by Beacham's short account of pantomime (1999: 141-47), van Sickle (2004: xxvii) suggested in the second edition of his landmark study of Vergil's *Eclogues* that the art of pantomime dancing may be a key for a “fresh look at the *Bucolics*.”

¹⁵ For a historical sketch, see Garelli 2007: 147-208 and briefly Lada-Richards 2007: 19-28. Some pointers are given **below, p. x.**

B.C.E. Working with Servius is bound to be work at the perilous outermost edge, the rim of the historically knowable. But I *do* want to make the case that this miniature anecdote is infinitely more valuable than classical scholarship has tended to believe. Before brushing it aside or treating it as a lone, incomprehensible shred of twilight Republican culture, we must gain the best possible understanding of it as a vestige of ‘traffic’ and negotiations across the cultural divide. Taking Servius seriously gives us the impetus to explore more decisively dimensions of Roman life that have been messily sidelined as a result of the systematic privileging of texts in our surveys of Roman intellectual landscapes over the centuries. At the end of our inquiry we don’t even have to pronounce Servius (or rather Servius’ sources) right and true; this does not have to be a zero-sum game. Even the mere ‘suspension’ of our ‘disbelief’ forms a useful basis wherefrom the literary experience of late Republican Rome can be profitably explored. Servius’ extract may still be a ‘myth,’ an ‘anecdote,’ but, as such narratives go, this is, I submit, an incredibly helpful one, provided we commit to pressing it into the service of larger inquiries regarding the “circulation” of cultural energy¹⁶ between élite and popular culture.

Before the argument, however, a few clarifications are in order. First regarding the star of this article, the historical individual (Volumnia) Cytheris, mime actress¹⁷ and

¹⁶ On the notion of a “circulation of social energy,” see Greenblatt 1988: 19.

¹⁷ Cytheris *qua* mime actress: Cic. *Phil.* 2.20 (*mima uxor*), 58 (*mima*), 61-2 (*mimula*, *mima*), 69 (*mima*), 77 (*illa mima*); Cic. *Att.* 10.16.5 (*mima*), Plin. *Nat.* 8.55 (*cum mima Cytheride*); Plutarch, *Ant.* 9.7 (Cytheris as coming from the same acting stable as the mime Sergius). As a stage name for a *mima*, “Cytheris” is very aptly chosen, implying

freedwoman of Volumnius Eutrapelus,¹⁸ one of Antony's *collusores et sodalis*, 'gambling partners and cronies' (Cic. *Phil.* 13.3). The slim textual residue left in her wake is far from able to conjure up the aura of her artistic *cum* erotic presence. What exactly do we know about Cytheris? Not much. Chronologically our earliest glimpse of her is (via Cicero's eyes) in Antony's retinue in May 49 BC: carried among laurel-bearing lictors "in an open litter, like a second wife" (*Att.* 10.10.5; cf. *Att.* 10.16.5 and *Phil.* 2. 58), she is (in Cicero's propaganda) emblematic of Antony's dissolute morals. Arriving in Brundisium "in the bosom" (*in sinum*) and "embrace" (*in complexum*) of his "little actress" (*Phil.* 2.61) is typical of Antony's life style, but befits more the man destined to lead his life "with his chin and mind" (*mentum mentemque*) placed on mime actresses' laps (*in gremiis mimarum*) (*Phil.* 13.24) than the ideal Roman statesman. It is uncertain how long the affair with Antony, "noster Cytherius" (*Att.* 15.22, June 44 BCE), lasted,¹⁹ but one key piece of the puzzle feels securely in place in the socio-political landscape of late Republican Rome. Even after her manumission Cytheris would have been

"Greek lineage, slave provenance, and the carnal sexuality associated with Venus/Aphrodite", herself associated with the island of Cythera (Keith 2011: 45).

¹⁸ For the identification of 'Cytheris' (stage name) with 'Volumnia', freedwoman of Volumnius Eutrapelus, see primarily Servius *ad Ecl.* 10.1: *Cytheridem meretricem, libertam Volumnii* (Thilo-Hagen 3: 118); cf. Cic. *Phil.* 2.58 on Cytheris as part of Antony's retinue, greeted "not by that well known mime-stage name of hers but as Volumnia" (*non noto illo et mimico nomine, sed Volumniam*).

¹⁹ On Cytheris and Antony: Cic. *Att.* 10.10.5, 10.16.5; *Phil.* 2. 20, 2. 58, 2. 61-62, 2. 69-70, 2. 77; Plut. *Ant.* 9.5-9.

under obligation to furnish services (*praestare operam*) to her former master, now her patron. This mainly entailed giving free performances for Eutrapelus and his friends — but there were other ways she could show her loyalty, for example by becoming the mistress of the powerful men with whom he associated . . . The wealthy Eutrapelus expected to gain something from his interest in the theater, if only in political terms (Traina 2001: 89).

Capable of trafficking in both artistic currency as well as sexual pleasure, Cytheris would have proved a tremendous asset. Despite Cicero's sneer and (pretend?) embarrassment at having found himself — by accident— at the same dinner party with her in Eutrapelus' house (Cic. *Fam.* 9.26.2),²⁰ she may have been a *docta puella* — a discerning, appreciative reader, capable of evaluating poetic composition,²¹ as the mistresses of elegiac poetry are regularly assumed to be, or even of composing her own verse and songs, as Propertius claims his Cynthia does.²² If the erotic preferences of Cornelius

²⁰ The important point here is that Cytheris has been placed on equal terms with Cicero, she is a fellow-guest at her patron's table, reclining “below Eutrapelus”. Given that bonds between erotic rivals can be as powerful as the bonds linking any of these rivals with the beloved, Cytheris' “circulation” in this homosocial network “implicitly strengthened the bonds of male friendship, elite entitlement, and Roman solidarity between Volumnius and his friends” (Keith 2011: 41).

²¹ See Habinek's discussion (1998) of the semantic range of *doctus*, elucidating in particular the kind of doctitude applicable to the elegiac *docta puella* (127-36). Cf. James 2003: 219.

²² Prop. 1. 2. 27-28; 2.3-19-22.

Gallus, the eldest in the canon of Roman love elegists, resembled those of his successors, one of whom desired to be read (*legisse*) in the lap (*in gremio*) of a *docta puella* (Prop. 2.13.11), it may well have been the convergence of grace, sensuality and ‘doctitude’ that recommended Cytheris to him as his beloved and poetic inspiration.²³ It is a sobering thought that we would not have been able to link Volumnia Cytheris with Gallus’ *puella*, Lycoris,²⁴ had it not been for Servius’ *scholia* on Vergil’s Sixth and Tenth *Eclogues*. Both historical individuals, Gallus, the poet, and “Lycoris,” his girl, enter Vergil’s pastoral world in *Eclogue* 10, the former haunting the poem with the hopelessness of his troubled loves (*sollicitos . . . amores*, *Ecl.* 10. 6), the latter with her cruel absence, away from her home (*procul a patria*, 46). In “a piece of information not preserved elsewhere nor deducible from the text of Vergil” (Hollis 2007: 230), Servius explains that the name “Lycoris” is used instead of “Cytheris” (*Lycoris pro Cytheris*, Thilo-Hagen 3: 119).²⁵ Whomsoever she was following “through snow and rough camps” (*perque nives perque*

²³ As in Mart. *Spect.* 8.73.6: *ingenium Galli pulchra Lycoris erat*.

²⁴ The link between Gallus and Lycoris is so strong in the Latin poetic tradition (Prop. 2. 34.91-92; Ov. *Am.* 1.15.29-30, *Ars am.* 3.537, *Tr.* 2.445-46; Verg. *Ecl.* 10. 2-3, 21-23) that it formed the basis for the attribution of the Qasr Ibrîm elegiacs to Gallus (Anderson, Parsons, and Nisbet 1979).

²⁵ See also Servius on *Ecl.* 6. 11 (quoted at the start of this piece); Servius on *Ecl.* 10. 1 (Thilo-Hagen 3: 118) on Gallus as the author of four books on the subject of his love affair with Cytheris (*amorum suorum de Cytheride scripsit libros quattuor*), whom he further identifies as *Cytheridem meretricem, libertam Volumnii* (Thilo-Hagen 3: 118); Servius on *Ecl.* 10.6, once again clarifying: *quam Lycorin vocat* (Thilo-Hagen 3: 119).

horrida castra, 23),²⁶ Vergil's "brief song" (*pauca ... carmina*, 1-2) for his Gallus (*meo Gallo*, 2) is presented as a composition "such as Lycoris herself might read" (*quae legat ipsa Lycoris*, 2). Yet—"read" how and in what context? "Read" privately, in literary approbation,²⁷ "with delicate voice" (*deducta ... voce*), like Cynthia reads Propertius' *deducta carmina*?²⁸ "Read" so that she might be seduced by a lover who cannot "transcend or give up his passion for her"?²⁹ "Read"/recite,³⁰ with full technical control of phrasing, breathing, inflection and voice modulation (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.1-2), a subtle reference to her theatrical *persona* and the likelihood that she, a seasoned *mima*, might take a professional interest³¹ in a text brimming with performative qualities? "Read"/perform in the way she performed (if we believe in Servius) the other "Gallan" poem of the book collection, *Eclogue* 6?

²⁶ Servius *ad. Ecl.* 10.1 (Thilo-Hagen 3: 118) identifies Antony (a renewal of the affair?); other possibilities are Volumnius Eutrapelus himself and M. Junius Brutus (*De viris illustribus* 82.2) or Decimus Brutus (see Anderson, Parsons, Nisbet 1979: 153).

²⁷ So in Prop. 2.24b.21: *me modo laudabas et carmina nostra legebas* ("just now you were praising me and reading my poems").

²⁸ Prop. 2.33b.38: *et mea deducta carmina voce legis* ("and you read my refined poems with a delicate voice").

²⁹ So Perkell 1996: 132.

³⁰ Cf. Prop. 2.26b.25-26.

³¹ See Panayotakis 2008: 192, crediting Philip Hardie *per litteras*.

Vergil's use of *legere*, the most unmarked, neutral term at his disposal to refer to the act of reading,³² offers scant help to us, and this is, in any case, the last time we find a living Cytheris / Lycoris in extant Roman literature. But the uncertainty over the envisaged mode of her “reading” the *Eclogue* takes us straight into the second grey area involved in the present piece, namely the lack of precision concerning the particular genre of performance implied by Servius' *cantare*, the verb describing Cytheris' presentation of the *Eclogue* in the theater: *cantasse in theatro*. Ambiguity arises from the fact that the semantic field associated with *cantare* was exceptionally large and malleable, not to be shoehorned into a particular generic area. More than a specific activity, *cantare* seems to have been used to denote a widely applicable mode or presentational idiom. It became the qualifier *par excellence* “for that full scale re-enactment, upon the stage or in a style appropriate to the stage” (Quinn 1982: 157),³³ the style in question being overly expressive, implying a sense of spectacularity and theatricalization, “some kind of mimetic performance” (Quinn 1982: 158).³⁴ But even beyond this point there is a further grey area spanning the meanings of *singing* and *performing* (Lowrie 2009: 17). While *canere* is the term most clearly evoking the notion of a disembodied voice, *cantare* acknowledges the performer's corporeality as the driving

³² Valette-Cagnac 1997: 23: “le terme le plus neutre”.

³³ In Quintilian's understanding of the performance landscape, *cantare* is indissolubly linked with *modulatio scenica* (modulations that recall the stage, *Inst.* 11.3.57) and feels more natural when complete with performance accoutrements, such as flutes, harps and cymbals (11.3.59).

³⁴ Cf. the rich discussion of Markus 2000, covering a spectrum of cognate issues.

power of his/her creativity.³⁵ It seems to cover the full intensity of dramatic expression, encompassing not only aural but also visual, physical presence, complete with movement and gesture — a gesture far from ornamental but functioning as a constitutive part of the action, the embodiment of feeling and thought, the carrier of affective power. Indeed, as Cytheris was a mime actress, one of the most likely performative registers for her *cantus* or *canticum* would have been gestural expressiveness and dancing. A securely documented skill required of mimes was the ability to dance, not only in the performance landscape known to Choricus of Gaza in the Hellenized East of the fifth century C.E.³⁶ but also in first century B.C.E. Rome, where a lead mime's dancing prowess could be the subject of dinner conversation³⁷ and Lucretius' dreams could be haunted by the fluid delicacy of dancing girls on the mime stage (Lucr. 4.978-82).³⁸ Mimetic dancing on dramatic themes formed an area of overlap between the cognate areas of mime and

³⁵ For another difference between *canere* and *cantare* relevant to this article's overall argument, see **n. x** below.

³⁶ Choricus, *Apol. Mim.* 124: δεῖ καὶ χορεύειν ἐπίστασθαι, “he [the mime] needs to know how to dance.”

³⁷ See, e.g., Hor. *Sat.* 2.6.72 with Porphyrio's scholion *ad loc.* on Lepos as an *archimimus*.

³⁸ The dancing skill of Republican female stage artists (some of Eastern provenance and slave standing) has ample epigraphic support (see, e.g. Starks 2008) and dovetails with Lucian's flash-back on pantomime's early history, when the dancers both danced and sang, before the two activities became the concern of different categories of artists (*Salt.* 30), *cantores* and *saltatores*.

pantomime,³⁹ the latter raising a particularly complex question: to what extent is it legitimate to invoke the genre of pantomime dancing in a discussion of the forties B.C.E?

⁴⁰ Although there is no conceivable need to posit the existence of anything like a fully-fledged pantomime genre in order to entertain the possibility of mimetic dancing on Cytheris' part, even a fleeting glance at the road *leading up* to the emergence of pantomime as a distinct theatrical form in the early Augustan period will clear some common misconceptions.

Pantomime's official birthday is registered in 23/22 B.C.E.⁴¹ But while this date does indeed signal pantomime's explosive entrance into Roman festival life as a grand style, flamboyant public spectacle, a lavish, multi media extravaganza, non genre-specific traces of danced entertainments are visible quite early on in Roman culture. Dance numbers accompanied by instrumental music are said to have formed the core of the Etruscan practices grafted onto the *Ludi Romani* when the first *ludi scaenici* were introduced in 364 BCE,⁴² while more distinctly pantomimic features seem to have

³⁹ For an exemplary discussion of the grey area between mythologized mime and dance at the Games of Flora, see Wiseman 1999, building in part on McKeown 1979.

⁴⁰ Cf. Allen 1972: 5n13, claiming that “Cytheris' performance ... would antedate the institution of the pantomime by Pylades and Bathyllus about 22 BC.”

⁴¹ See Ath. 20d; Jer. *Chron.*, on the year 22 B.C.E. (*PL* 27, 553-54); Zosim. 1.6.1; entries in the *Suda* under “Athenodorus,” “pantomime dancing,” and “Pylades.” See primarily Jory 1981.

⁴² See Livy 7.2.4, part of the historian's theatrical excursus which may be ultimately derived from Varro's lost *De ludis scaenicis*, probably composed in the late fifties B.C.E.

become firmly ensconced in Roman theatrical traditions by the time of Plautus in the late third century BCE at the very least.⁴³ In conjunction with evidence for increasing migration of expertly trained dancers (alongside a host of other professionals) from the Hellenized East,⁴⁴ a Ciceronian passing reference (*Rab. Post.*35) to some kind of theatrical import from cosmopolitan Alexandria,⁴⁵ the city which had the strongest reputation as a cradle and hotspot of pantomime performances throughout antiquity,⁴⁶

⁴³ Some of Plautus' protagonists strike dance poses; others mention professional dancers or teachers of dancing; others indulge in vivid gestural — especially hand— language (*cheironomia*) conveying an emotional state or inner thought that requires “translation” to an audience of bystanders. For a full discussion see Zimmermann 2016 [1995], who reads *Miles* 200-215 in particular as “an actual pantomime scene” (319), “the oldest literary testimony to the presence of pantomime on the Roman stage” (318).

⁴⁴ On the importance of itinerant troupes and Greek theatrical traditions/repertoire in Magna Graecia and Sicily see now Feeney 2016 *passim*. By the end of the century some of pantomime's Eastern stars can be found competing against each other on Italian soil (see, e.g., inscription *CIL* vi.10115, from Tivoli, dating from the end of the 1st cent BCE and commemorating Nomius from Syria and Hylas from Salmacis as competitors besides the great Pylades from Cilicia).

⁴⁵ See further Wiseman 2008b.

⁴⁶ Aelius Aristides *ap. Lib. Or.* 64.80 posits Egypt as “the first to bring into the world the pantomime evil,” while according to the Byzantine chronographer Malalas (*Chronicle* 17.12), Alexandria was often an exception to the periodic empire-wide ban on

may well be pointing to a more clearly defined artistic style starting to gain attention as a novelty in the late 60s B.C.E. A few decades later, some kind of imitative gestural performance to sung narrative can be glimpsed through Livy's attempt to draw a sharp dividing line between the decorous dancing of old (executed *sine carmine ullo, sine imitandorum carminum actu*, “without any song, without expressing the content of song through gestures,” Liv.7.2.4) and degenerate dance practices taking hold in his own day: the irritating fashionable mode contemporary with Livy is precisely the pantomime's signature mode, consisting in the expressive rendering of the contents of a song through mimetic gesture⁴⁷— the double negative *sine ... sine* conveying the intensity of Livy's disapproval.

Especially relevant to the present piece are not only the immediate choreographic ancestry of Cytheris, which includes the gestural expressiveness of Dionysia, star *saltatricula* of the 50s B.C.E.,⁴⁸ and the so-called *emboliariae*, “entr-acte female dancers,”⁴⁹ but also scraps of evidence which indicate that some form of mimetic dancing

pantomimes. Further pointers to Egypt's connection with dancing in Lada-Richards 2007: 177n21.

⁴⁷ See Jory 1981: 154. Cf. Habinek 2005: 107 and Manuwald 2011: 31. For a reference to the art of the *pantomimus* made by Suetonius, preserved by Donatus and probably originating in Varro's theatrical treatises, see Wiseman 2014.

⁴⁸ Starks 2008: 118 sees in Dionysia the practitioner of “a silent, gesticulative dance style that would eventually be moulded ... into the style later known as pantomime.”

⁴⁹ Either soloists or *corps de ballet* girls performing in dance interludes on stage or in private functions; see Wiseman 1985a, 26-53; Starks 2008.

on mythological themes may have been a notable feature of Roman performances from at least the early first century B.C.E. Particularly worth mentioning here are (a) a reference, probably datable to the 70s B.C.E., to the mythical Actaeon's dismemberment (*sparagmos*) as furnishing material for “trifles” (*nugas*), unpretentious, small-scale plots for dancers (*saltatoribus*) in the theater (*in theatro*) (Varro *Sat. Men.* fr. 513 Astbury);⁵⁰ (b) Horace's reference to a danced imitation of the (love-struck?) Cyclops in *Satire 1* (datable to 38/7 B.C.E.),⁵¹ already employing the trope whereby the verb *saltare*, one of the technical words for dancing, governs an internal accusative, which is the syntax characteristic of references to fully-fledged pantomimes in both Greek and Latin sources until deep into late antiquity.⁵² For Garton (1982: 582) this is “theatre language which borders very close upon, if it does not directly refer to, pantomime.” The same holds true for the syntax of (c), the final reference to mythological mimetic dancing, that is Velleius Paterculus' side-swipe at the consular L. Munatius Plancus, who shamelessly “danced Glaucus at a banquet” (*Glaucum saltasset in convivio*), crawling upon his knees, nude, with a body painted blue and equipped with a fish's tail and reeds upon his head.⁵³ If the

⁵⁰ See primarily Wiseman 2008a: 215-16.

⁵¹ Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.63: *pastorem saltaret uti Cyclopa rogabat*; cf. Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.124-25: *ut qui | nunc Satyrum, nunc agrestem Cyclopa movetur* (“like someone dancing now the role of a satyr now that of the rustic Cyclops”), with Barchiesi 2006: 419n30 referring to the Cyclops here as a “pantomime hero.” For possible vestiges of pantomime in Horace's work, see Lada-Richards 2019 (forthcoming)

⁵² Kokolakis 1976.

⁵³ See Vell. Pat. 2.83.2, with Wiseman 1985a: 46-47.

saltatio of the merman Glaucus followed some kind of mythological narrative (e.g., along the lines of Cornificius' lost epyllion *Glaucus* or Ovid's "Glaucus and Scylla" story in the *Metamorphoses*), the heady brew of poetic and dance matter it implies is similar to the close-knit matrix of neoteric style poetry and mimetic dancing which could have been at stake in a performance of the Sixth *Eclogue* by Volumnia Cytheris. Whatever the particular stylistic flavoring of Cytheris' performance, from the point of view of first century B.C.E. chronology it is perfectly conceivable that she be placed in the direct line of ancestry of ancient pantomime. Moreover, just as the inventiveness and stylistic versatility of another exceptional woman, Marie Sallé, catalyzed the creation of the eighteenth-century "ballet d'action" in England and France, Cytheris' hybrid performance, weaving in and out of genres and artistic modes, may have been instrumental in the long process of dance's transformation from a "fringe" entertainment at the margin of public festival days (Jory 2004: 148) to a fixture at the very heart of the Roman theatrical experience.

§1. Unconscious bias: staring it in the face

Rome, first century B.C.E., theater of Pompey: on the day's program, among countless spectacular attractions, celebrated *mima* Volumnia Cytheris and Vergil. They are not on parallel tracks. They are actually locked in the same, as it were, playbill, Vergil by means of Cytheris, Cytheris performing Vergil. It is here, in this horrific side-by-sidedness of hyper-sophisticated poet and commonly available pop star, that lies the root of the story's misadventure, its checkered reception. How can that be? How could she and Vergil have occupied the same cultural space? Servius' text does not even follow a conceptual layout that would imply the vertical positioning of the two names, the poet's on top, the

performer's lower down. Despite the blindingly obvious prestige imbalance between them, Vergil and Cytheris are presumed to operate artistically on a level playing field. But here is the first and most important catch: Cytheris must have been born *ca* 70-64 B.C.E., her *floruit* positioned around 49-40 B.C.E.⁵⁴ By the time of the reported performance of *Eclogue* 6 she must have been already enjoying celebrity status, possessing both the highest level of public visibility and a hefty dose of notoriety.⁵⁵ Although we do understand that it would only have been natural for the relatively unknown Vergil,⁵⁶ a budding poet still in need of recognition, to have been the minor element in the proximity of a star of the contemporary culture industry,⁵⁷ the erosion of hierarchy, or more accurately the hierarchy *we expect* to see, between author and performer seems shocking enough for us to brand the entire story as aberrant. But aberration in this case is, I submit, a modern misconception, for in its own context Servius' story would not have seemed a misfit. A complex matrix of unexamined, hard-wired cultural assumptions and discipline-

⁵⁴ See Bonaria 1955-56: nos. 393-418; Garton 1972: 248 no.70. By 49 B.C.E. her stage name was already "well known" (Cic. *Phil.* 2.58).

⁵⁵ See Bristol 1996: 5 on the "typical career of a media star" as "likely to be characterized by extraordinary peaks of notoriety and public attention."

⁵⁶ Vergil would have been more or less an exact contemporary of Cytheris, yet a female dancer could have made her artistic debut (and hence have started making a name for herself) in her early teens, at a significantly younger age than a poet like Vergil.

⁵⁷ In the same way that a fledgling Shakespeare would always have been the second rated name compared to a mature Tarlton.

specific prejudices have blocked our understanding or even our desire to understand and confront the information head-on, for all that it is worth.

We can start from the most obvious place. Diachronically, cross-culturally, performance means embodiment, corporeality, materiality. Cytheris' alleged performance of Vergil's *Eclogue* would have substituted the subtle, sophisticated creation of a poet's mind with the carnal, voluptuous vocabulary of a corporeal 'text'. Similarly, with Cytheris' mediation, the channel of communication between Vergil and his addressees — a channel we imagine as primarily located in intellectual and emotional activity alone — would have become physical and visceral, fueled by ripples of seductiveness and sensuality. Cytheris would most probably have sung, and singing is an embodied experience in itself. Not only does it emanate from the body, as the materiality of the human voice is inextricably interwoven with the singing body that produces it; it also “sets up vibrations and resonances in the listener's body” (Koestenbaum 1993: 42), the listener's “vital organs” responding to “every turn” of the singer's “phrase” (Smart 2000: 10).⁵⁸ More than any other disciplinary area, opera studies have taught us that listening to a singing voice dissolves the boundaries between the ‘self’ and ‘other’:

Her voice enters me, makes me a ‘me’, an interior, by virtue of the fact that I have been entered. The singer, through osmosis, passes through the self's porous membrane, and discredits the fiction that bodies are separate, boundaried packages.

⁵⁸ Early Christian anti-theatrical criticism lambasts the “deadly songs” (*mortiferi cantus*) which become almost etched in the flesh and predispose one's mind to love (*mentem emolliant ad amores*, Ambrosius, *Hexaemeron*, 3.1.5 [*PL* 14. col. 157]).

The singer destroys the division between her body and our own, for her sound enters our system (Koestenbaum 1993: 43).⁵⁹

Like the operatic *diva* who stands before her audience having “wrested the composing voice away from the librettist and composer who wrote the score” (Abbate 1993: 254), Cytheris could have usurped, ‘swallowed,’ appropriated Vergil's male creative voice as the poet of the sixth *Eclogue*. When we also add the very real possibility that Cytheris, as a professional mime actress, would have danced as well as sung,⁶⁰ the sensory overload on Vergil's otherwise single-layered, ‘naked’ text increases and the putative audience's physical, visceral engagement in the performance deepens. Being the most inescapably somatic art, dance demands to be experienced *within* and *through* the viewer's “own musculature,” binding thus audience and performer in kinaesthetic discourse.⁶¹ As a singer and/or dancer Cytheris provokes by inserting into Vergilian scholarship the live corporeality of a performer's body, while centuries of intense *somatophobia*, with all of its attendant connotations within the Western cultural tradition, have severely

⁵⁹ Koestenbaum's primary concern is same-sex response to operatic singing, but, as Smart 2000: 10 notes, “the idea of the singer's voice resonating through the listener's body” is “relevant beyond the psyche of the queer fan.”

⁶⁰ See above, p. x.

⁶¹ So Martin 1983 [1946]: 22, the influential dance critic who first developed the notion of kinesthaesia in relation to dance, understanding it as an event that could be replicated at a subliminal level *within* the viewer's own body. Bibliography is now immense. In antiquity the phenomenon is well described in Aristaenetus, *Ep.* 1.26.13-18 and Tatian, *Ad Gr.* 22.2; cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.55.

predisposed us to resist the idea that one of the most exquisitely crafted Vergilian literary pieces might have been experienced physically and sensually.

In reality this is infinitely more complex than it sounds. For, even without Servius' prominent labeling of Cytheris as a *meretrix*, we know how persistently the Roman stage arts were haunted by the specter of prostitution, the most facile equation being between the notion of sexual availability and the male or female performer who display themselves in public, soliciting the audience's voyeuristic gaze.⁶² The dancing / singing woman in particular is invariably constructed as inescapably eroticized, every part of her body capable of whipping up an audience's libidinal energy,⁶³ her voice acting, to borrow Ovid's expression, "as her own bawd."⁶⁴ Guided by the memorable pictures of our male

⁶² See primarily Edwards 1997, explaining the stigma of *infamia* shared in Roman legislation by public performers and prostitutes. A blanket assumption, which Libanius attempts to dispel, was spelt out by Aelius Aristides: ἅπαντες ὀρχησταὶ πόρνοι (*ap.* Libanius, *Or.* 64.43).

⁶³ To take an example as close as possible to Cytheris' Rome, the speaker in Ovid's *Am.* 2.4.29-32 affirms that a dancing girl moving her arms rhythmically (*numerosaque bracchia ducit*) and bending her tender flank with the softness of her art (*molli ... ab arte*) is sensual matter explosive enough to turn Hippolytus himself into a Priapic lover (*Priapus erit*).

⁶⁴ See *Ars am.* 3.315-16; cf. *Am.* 2.4.25-26 on the desire aroused by a sweetly singing female voice. The heightened erotic charge of the female singing voice, capable of ravishing the senses and throwing an audience into raptures is the subject of a third

informants we are pre-conditioned to imagine every female performer in the mold of Martial's *puellae Gaditanae*, swaying their hips, shaking their buttocks and with wanton, lascivious motions (Mart. *Spect.* 6.71.1: *lascivos ... gestus*; cf. *Spect.* 5.78.27-28) shimmying all the way down to the floor.⁶⁵ In other words, a powerful subconscious impetus for our aversion to Servius' story has to do with the horror of meretricious female performance it automatically evokes, the same horror that makes it difficult for critics to accept the fact that T. S. Eliot penned an effusive obituary for popular music-hall artist (the Cytheris of her day?) Marie Lloyd.⁶⁶ Lodged deep in the many centuries of anti-theatrical and anti-feminist traditions,⁶⁷ the fear of theater as a site of moral transgression and pollution rears its head: the physical presence of the sensual female body in the shape of the actress / *meretrix* Cytheris conjures the picture of the stage as a locus of unrestrained licence and unbridled sexual commerce⁶⁸ — a very Roman picture whose

century B.C.E. epigram by Dioscorides (*AP* 5.138); in Augustan times, see Crinagoras, *AP* 9.429 (declaring himself inflamed and pierced in the heart by a female singer's song).

⁶⁵ See, e.g. *Priapea* 19; cf. Juv. 11.164 (schol. *ad* 162 understands such girls to be *pantomimas* who “indulge in wantonness,” *quae lascivant*).

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Chinitz 2003: 14-15, drawing attention to the fact that “[f]ew of the numerous books on Eliot even contain an index entry for Lloyd” (14) and that “most critics who do mention the essay voice some surprise at its existence” (15).

⁶⁷ On the close affinity between antitheatrical and antifeminist rhetorical positions, see, e.g. Maus 1979.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Cyprian, *Donat.* 8.151-53, *Ep.* 2.1; Tert. *Spect.* 17.1; Tat. *Orat.* 22; Novat. *Spect.* 6.2.

tenacious grip survived deep into the Western (anti-)theatrical tradition. If “[a]ctresses came to symbolize everything that was wrong with the theatre” (French 1998: 303), by resisting the story we wish, subconsciously, to salvage the purity of the *Eclogue* from Cytheris' meretricious interpretative sully. The picture becomes cloudier still when one remembers that the narrative core of this particular *Eclogue*, Silenus' song, privileges stories of carnal desire, illicit and destructive love (§4). Savoring such narratives of passion on the written page (the *pagina* foregrounded in line 12 of the *Eclogue*) is one thing — raw female sexuality is multiply distanced by layers of embedded, inset narratives before reaching out to the reader. On stage, however, Silenus' passion-laden song would have been given a physical, bodily substance by means of Cytheris' corporeal expressiveness and Cytheris' voice, complete with mellifluous melodies, heart-melting pitches and libidinally inflected rhythms soliciting the audience's corporeal response. Third person narrative might even have been reduced to the bare essentials, allowing Cytheris to embody and present the stories from her own first-subject position, ‘becoming,’ without any mediation, Pasiphae (46), Scylla (74) or Philomela (79). The change would have been momentous and constitutive, exercising on the audience an almost visceral effect, compelling it by the force of kinaesthetic energy to live momentarily ‘inside’ the performed stories. Our most instinctive first reaction, then, is to wish for the woman to be silenced, the insidious sexing up of Vergil's poetry expunged, the last drop of real life female desire driven out of the picture altogether.

Hand in hand with the “*meretrix* Cytheris” goes another culturally determined assumption, namely the almost axiomatic un-coupling of sexually attractive femininity

from intellectual excellence or even intellectual activity at any creditable level. Pop queen Madonna hits the nail on the head:

People have this idea that if you're sexual and beautiful and provocative, then there's nothing else you could possibly offer. People have *always* had that image about women. ... I was in control of everything I was doing, and I think that when people realized that, it confused them.⁶⁹

How prepared are we for the possibility that the historical woman, the stage artist Volumnia Cytheris, could have spoken like this —justifiably? The truth is we have seldom embraced such a possibility in the first place. We have learnt to think of the Roman female entertainer solely as a commodity, and have therefore either overlooked Cytheris' creative agency or dismissed it as irrelevant at best, worthless at worst. Even when not consciously setting out to downgrade Cytheris' artistic presence, we do not tend to think of her as a real player in the Republican literary and/or aesthetic field. Granted, documented 'real' players were in the overwhelming majority free male citizens, not *meretrices*, even of the most refined kind. Attempting to "creat[e] an excessively rosy image of the opportunities for female artistic achievement" in Republican Roman culture may be unhelpful and misleading.⁷⁰ However, caveats notwithstanding, given our seriously wanting evidence, there is no room for dogmatism, even less for prejudicial assumptions. Even if it were impossible to locate serious female artists along the lines

⁶⁹ Quoted in McClary 2002: 149 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁰ Goldhill 2005 warns about the dangers of doing so in Hellenistic culture (quote from 286).

explored here for Cytheris,⁷¹ ‘rogue’ elements disturbing an otherwise perfectly coherent picture do occasionally exist in all cultural contexts. An eminently helpful example is the case of Aristodama, a third-century B.C.E. epic poetess from Smyrna, recipient of the totally unlikely for a woman honor of citizenship of the Greek city of Lamia, for having “made many displays of her own poems” in public recitals.⁷² Without the single inscription that records her achievement and a second decree extant as a Delphic copy awarding her another long list of honors,⁷³ this “public recognition of female activity in an area traditionally seen strongly as a male preserve” is not something we could have predicted (Goldhill 2005: 278). Similarly, albeit in a completely different context, if we knew about Loie Fuller, the sensational dancing phenomenon of the early 20th century,

⁷¹ A special case apart is the ultra-sophisticated *docta puella* of Roman Love Elegy, skilled, *inter alia*, in music-making, song and dance. Skinner (2003: 406) is “skeptical about the genuine existence of a courtesan class in Rome, Volumnia Cytheris notwithstanding” and, in any case, some of the best late twentieth-century scholarship on Latin Love Elegy has concentrated on the figure of the beloved as a literary construct. But it is difficult to turn a blind eye to the assumed artistic accomplishments of the elegiac girls over the whole spectrum of poetry, music and dance. Are we falling into a trap set up by the *praeceptor amoris*, who declares “learned girls” discerning in matters of music and song “a most rare breed,” a *rarissima turba* (Ov. *Ars am.* 2.281)?

⁷² IG IX 2, 62 (a decree of the Aeolian League). Rutherford 2009: 238 characterizes the granting of citizenship to a woman as “conceptually highly awkward in a society which does not, generally speaking, allow that women can be citizens at all”.

⁷³ See Rutherford 2009: 238-39.

as little as we know about Cytheris, it would have seemed perverse to think of her as anything other than a sexually daring music-hall skirt dancer, one of the many bawdy acts offered at the Parisian Folies Bergère, where she premiered. Yet Loie Fuller was no less than the Muse of symbolists and modernists, an artist of remarkable intelligence,⁷⁴ respected by cabaret audiences and the aristocracy alike and earning such implausible admirers as the Rothchilds and the Nobel Prize-crowned Curies. In other words, it should not be acceptable to simply take cover behind the tacit assumption that, as a sexually attractive, freely available female, Cytheris would have had no brains of her own and would have ended up “prostituting” Vergil's poetry alongside her own self and art. A scenario whereby Cytheris' performance of Vergil's *Eclogue* found its way into and exercised a formidable grip on Roman collective memory because the aural and visual experience she provided was aesthetically complete and powerful should not be considered too far-fetched to enter scholarly discussion.

A different reason for instinctively wishing Servius' incident away has to do with the deep-seated premise that mass accessibility to the élite cultural product commodifies and ultimately devalues it.⁷⁵ By the mere act of transferring the rich cultural fare of Vergil's

⁷⁴ The novelist Anatole France, who wrote a Preface to Fuller's autobiography in 1908, described her as “merveilleusement intelligente” and declared that, given her knowledge of astronomy, chemistry and physiology, “she could have made an intellectual” (“elle aurait pu faire une savante”). See Fuller 1908: 7.

⁷⁵ Moreover, as Huyssen 1986 argued in a landmark work, mass accessibility to the cultural product has been consistently invested with the ability to gender such a product

sixth *Eclogue* from the field of “restricted” to that of “large scale” cultural production,⁷⁶ Cytheris would have compromised the poem's artistic merit: popularized, marketable, in best-seller format, Vergil's *Eclogue* performed in the theater by Volumnia Cytheris would have been on a par with a long line of high culture artistic products which become re-labeled as “middlebrow” art once appropriated by a broad public of non experts — we can think of Albinoni's *Adagio*, Strauss's *Blue Danube*⁷⁷ or, to allow for popularizing adaptation as well, Liszt's second *Hungarian Rhapsody*, most widely known as the sound track to a (brilliant) *Tom and Jerry* cartoon. Gian Biagio Conte's brief discussion of *recitationes* in Rome (an institution vital to the story, as we shall see in §2) is most revealing here:

As often happens, the change in a literary work's intended audience brings about a transformation in the formal characteristics of the work itself. Now an article of consumption in public halls or theaters, literature tends to acquire theatrical, ‘spectacular’ features. The measure of worth becomes the audience's applause, and this audience is no longer the restricted aristocracy of taste that the Augustan poets

feminine — a habit rooted in the 19th century but now progressively divested of its persuasive power.

⁷⁶ The terminology is that of Bourdieu 1993: 39 and *passim*, who distinguishes between cultural production aimed primarily at the producer's peers and equals (“the producers produce for other producers”) and the “*symbolically* excluded and discredited” field wherein cultural production is aimed at non-producers, that is to say mere consumers, the “market,” the broadest audience conceivable.

⁷⁷ Bourdieu 1984: 8 talks of classical music “devalued by popularization.”

addressed, but a much larger public, of a social and cultural level that is not always high, which necessarily implies a vulgarization of the literary product. (Conte 1994: 405)

It is far more comforting to think that Vergil's masterpiece did not become (in his lifetime at least!) the source of coarse, vulgar enjoyment (such as we *assume* Cytheris' version would have been) but remained exclusively associated with the rarefied, sublimated pleasures of intellectual appropriation, pleasures *de facto* closed to the uneducated masses, the primary addressees of a Cytheris 'spectacular'. Cytheris' popularization threatens the inviolability of the aesthetic sphere and exemplifies the incursion of lowbrow tastes on to the hallowed ground of literary taste and value — hence we blot it out. It is the very same logic that, as Bourdieu (1984: 53) writes, incites professionals to “indicate their distance from ordinary songs by rejecting with disgust the most popular and most ‘vulgar’ singers” and the middle classes to “find in song ... an opportunity to manifest their artistic pretension by refusing the favourite singers of the working classes.” It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the ancient pedigree to such acts of cultural élitism is ubiquitous and impeccable. Dance, Plutarch laments, a highly legitimate art, became paradigmatically full of bad taste in his own time,⁷⁸ having chosen to “accost the kind of poetry appealing to the masses” (πάνδημόν τινα ποιητικὴν προσεταιρισμένη) and having turned itself into a crowd-pleaser, holding sway over “capricious and mindless” (ἐμπλήκτων καὶ ἀνοήτων) theater audiences (*Mor.* 748d). In the same late Republican / early Augustan era under discussion in the present piece, Horace equates

⁷⁸ See Plut. *Mor.* 748c: “today, however, nothing has the benefit of bad taste

(ἀπολέλαυκε τῆς κακομουσίας) to such an extent as dancing (ὥς ἡ ὄρχησις).”

wide circulation with prostitution and the slippery “downward” slope⁷⁹ and is horrified at the thought of being heard in mass assemblies (cf. §3) or being read by the undiscerning and the ignorant. As Feeney (2009: 25) puts it, “the idea that anyone at all can read him is presented as appalling.”

Hand in hand, almost inextricably interwoven with widening circles of consumption and vulgarization, goes the “new-modeling”⁸⁰ of an artistic product, so that it can best respond to the aesthetic sensibilities (and/or the degree of access to specialized codes) of addressees qualitatively different from those for whom it was originally created. Trying to imagine the sixth *Eclogue* as performed by Cytheris we assume — this time almost certainly correctly — some degree of adaptation, to take into account the possibilities offered by a large (probably a very large indeed) stage area as well as the necessity to

⁷⁹ See Horace, *Epist.* 1.20 (discussed again in §3 below) and the implication of progressive degradation in the soon-to-be-published book's desire to *descendere*: “as the verb *descendere* (5) suggests, once the book leaves the guarded seclusion of Horace's household, it is on its way down” (Oliensis 1995: 212). On the strong conceptual association of book publication/wide circulation and sexual prostitution in the Augustan period, see Fitzgerald 1992: 423-24; Percy 1994; Oliensis 1995; Fear 2000. As Fear 2000: 219 sums up Oliensis' thesis, “sexual integrity is equated with the book that is content with a few readers and prostitution with the book that seeks out the general public.”

⁸⁰ This was the term used by those wishing to modernize the Shakespearean corpus in Restoration England by reconfiguring some, most or even all of its constituent elements to suit the tastes of contemporary playgoers.

showcase her own special skills in singing, miming, dancing. But adaptation is almost inescapably linked with negative cultural evaluations, connoting a cultural product that is derivative, inferior, second rate, simplified, trivialized. As Hutcheon (2006: xi-xii) writes, the phenomenon of adaptation is at the receiving end of “constant critical denigration”:

Whether it be in the form of a videogame or a musical, an adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the ‘original’.

Academia, however, is passionately wedded to “originals.” As Hutcheon observes, “in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative, ‘belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior,’” with stronger “moralistic words used to attack film adaptations of literature: ‘tampering,’ ‘interference,’ ‘violation,’ . . . ‘betrayal,’ ‘deformation,’ ‘perversion,’ ‘infidelity,’ and ‘desecration’.”⁸¹ Those of us who work with texts (the older the better) are genetically, so to speak, predisposed to love, honor and privilege above all other the notion of holographs, the author's originary piece of work absolutely purged of illegitimate intrusions, totally free from unsanctioned, un-authorized, interpolated matter. A sizeable portion of today's global academy would rather have two indisputably authentic lines directly out of Vergil's, Euripides' or Shakespeare's “foul papers” than a handful of, say, contemporaneous popular songs (even though such songs would probably have shown us an awful lot more about what a Shakespearean or Euripidean play or Vergilian poem could have meant for their immediate addressees). As literature has always been assumed to have “axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form” (Hutcheon 2006: 4), the very concept of a text's

⁸¹ See Hutcheon 2006: 2, with further literature listed.

openness to revision, the very idea of violating a text's fixity, makes us immensably uncomfortable. The idea of a Vergilian *Eclogue* transmediated into music, song and dance we are bound to treat with extreme suspicion or even to resent as much as we resent the prospect of Shakespeare as an App or as a video game.

Finally, the credibility of Servius' information has been compromised by a string of cherished critical positionings that have often been treated as orthodoxy in Republican/Augustan literary history. Non-dramatic élite literary production and stage spectacle, this orthodoxy maintains, were located at the opposite sides of an epistemological divide, with no intermingling or cross-pollination: segregated from each other's aesthetic languages and practices, theater and élite literature were self-sufficient, separate, mutually exclusive worlds, moving at all times along parallel lines. More generally speaking, our understanding of this period has been guided by dichotomies: pure, rarefied, high literature versus lowly, unruly theater; page versus stage; reader versus listener and viewer; writing versus performance; élite versus popular. Such divisions fuel our thinking of stage idioms as synonymous with aesthetic vulgarity, coarseness, pollution and cultural defilement — afterall, we conveniently remind ourselves, Ovid wore his abstention from theatrical writing as a badge of honor (see §3) and in the Elder Seneca's view, writing for the pantomime stage was tantamount to “polluting” one's “talent.”⁸² Real literature, on the other hand, the product of an author's creative imagination, can only be fashioned away from the sweat, the dirt, the smells, the

⁸² *Suas.* 2.19, on the shadowy (for us) figure of Abronius Silo's son: by composing *fabulas* for the dancers (*pantomimis*) he “not only wasted but also defiled (*polluit*)” his “great talent” (*ingenium grande*).

sights and the sounds of mass audiences screaming, gaping or clapping in the packed theaters, as Horace sneers.⁸³ Feeling supremely uncomfortable with the idea of “sophisticated and allusive poetry . . . publicly performed,”⁸⁴ occasionally sharing even its performance space with “inexplicable dumb shows and noise,”⁸⁵ we have projected on the Roman cultural landscape a series of ‘either-or’ propositions that hold inquiry grid-locked. The greatest culprit here is the “preconception ... that sophisticated literature must be intended *only* for a cultured élite”⁸⁶ and therefore for a reading public, while the popular stage is the ultimate receptacle of either sub-literary products (such as mimes and pantomimes) or traditional, literary drama. The starker the dissociation of élite literary production from the stage the more suspect Servius' anecdote seems to us: if the stage was Cytheris' domain, axiomatically, it could never have been Vergil's!

Pulling now all strands together, it seems quite clear that the odds have been cumulatively stacked against the possibility that Cytheris (or any celebrity performer) could have presented a version of Vergil's literary gem (or any other A-list literary piece of any other A-list author) to instant acclaim in the public theater. This section has

⁸³ E.g. Horace, *Epist.* 2.1. 182-207.

⁸⁴ Cameron 1995: 30 (albeit on Hellenistic poetry). The “purely conjectural” assumption that sophisticated poetry *cannot* be publicly performed is one of the “unargued dogma(s)” that Cameron takes issue with.

⁸⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.10-12.

⁸⁶ Rejected by Wiseman 2015: 166 (my emphasis); at the other extreme, cf. e.g., Goldberg 1995: 43, on Republican epic as “a genre for private circulation rather than public performance”.

attempted to flag up the trouble spots in order to suggest that, ultimately, it is entirely *our* problem that we have a problem with Servius' information in the first place. How can we move ahead?

A very significant amount of scholarly work has been carried out in the last few decades, encouraging us to privilege the corporeal, oral and performative dimensions of literary production over the written and the textual⁸⁷— so much so that, as many have observed,⁸⁸ the pendulum has probably swung in the opposite direction and the overall picture may be in need of some re-calibration. However, the question of how best to deal with Servius will not become any easier if we simply look at it from the other side of the fence. The story will only be able to, as it were, breathe freely, if we allow it to unfold in a landscape where (a) high literature and the stage are acknowledged as different yet equal and happily conversing players;⁸⁹ and (b) where cultural boundaries are porous, cultural categories shifting and ‘culture’ itself has neither fixed perimeters nor a single preconceived, prescribed profile — in short where aesthetic worth can be accepted to reside no less comfortably in the realm of the marginal and the uneducated than in the scripts and libraries of the taste-makers. If Ovid could be a regular at the theater with

⁸⁷ As Habinek 2005: 211, for example, puts it: “. . . even literature is a bodily practice in ancient Rome . . . for all of the efforts by its proponents to differentiate it from popular or musical culture, it remains part of that culture and benefits from interpretation as such.”

⁸⁸ See, e.g. Feeney 2005; Lowrie 2006, a measured review of Habinek 2005.

⁸⁹ Cf. Wiseman 2016: 148 on “literature and performance” having “much more in common than traditional classical scholarship likes to think.”

friends (*Pont.* 2. 4. 20); if Lucretius (4. 978-82) could talk of the experience of audiences transfixed by the charm of dancing girls and undulating limbs; if Bathyllus could be the passion of Maecenas⁹⁰ no less than of the *plebs*; and if a book could be assumed to travel the distance from the poet's study to drinking parties, market places, crossroads, porticoes and taverns (*Mart. Spect.* 7.97.11-12), there is no reason why anyone should find it so “hard to imagine that the *Eclogues* could have been something like a smash hit on the popular stage” (Hörschele 2013: 39). The female performer who either “spreads her white arms in a soft gesture | or pours variegated measures from her lips” (*sive ... in molli diducit candida gestu | bracchia, seu varios incinit ore modos*) in the “theaters born” for Propertius' “destruction” (*o nimis exitio nata theatra meo*),⁹¹ could easily have been one of Cytheris' brethren, singing and dancing not bawdy skits but intricately crafted poetry on a par with the *Eclogues*. Fortunately, an ever-expanding body of work has drawn scholarly attention to the “traffic upstream” as well as down, that is to say the circulation of poetic matter between the uplands and the lowlands of literary production.⁹² However, given that several aspects of the overall dialectic between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ literature and art in the Roman world are still underexplored; moreover, given that lack of consensus on Servius' story means scholars tend to rely on it in order to support claims in

⁹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 1.54.2; Dio Cass. 54.17.5.

⁹¹ Prop. 2. 22A, 5-6 and 4.

⁹² For milestone discussions, see McKeown 1979; Fantham 1983 and especially 1989; Wiseman 1985a, 1998, 1999.

completely opposite directions,⁹³ separating fact from inference is crucial. Despite its oddity and eccentricity, I contend that far from being an anomaly, it blends most seamlessly with a cultural landscape where recurrent breachings of the ‘great divide’ were being negotiated with remarkable ease.

§2. From *recitatio* to the stage: performance and its discontents

Having cleared the ground regarding the layers of prejudice standing between us and Servius' information, we can proceed to scrutinize the information itself. Servius' extract begins with the mention of a *recitatio*: the sixth *Eclogue* was recited (*recitata*) by Vergil (*a Vergilio*) to huge acclaim (*ingenti favore*). A fashionable means of literary dissemination in late Republican and, even more so, imperial Rome, the institution of *recitationes* was in its infancy at the time of the *Eclogues*. It was apparently inaugurated in 39 B.C.E. by Asinius Pollio, the founder of Rome's first ever public library and, according to a notoriously puzzling statement of Seneca the Elder, “the first of all Romans to recite his own writings before an invited audience” (*primus enim omnium Romanorum advocatis hominibus scripta sua recitavit*, Seneca, *Controv.* 4. pref. 2).⁹⁴ Was Virgil perhaps one of the first to be honored with the chance to “recite” some of his poems to an “invited” audience in Pollio's new cultural hub, the “Hall of Liberty” (*Atrium*

⁹³ It would be eye-opening to construct a full picture of how exactly scholars have used Servius' comment and with what consequence for the author(s)/topic(s) under discussion.

⁹⁴ Dalzell 1955 remains fundamental reading.

Libertatis) which housed his library?⁹⁵ If Seneca's puzzling *aduocatis hominibus* implies not a select invited few but “a general summons,” a reading to “all who were interested or could afford the time to listen,”⁹⁶ Vergil could have had a good-sized gathering of people who did not “just happen” to be there but who responded to the advertisement of a literary event to be held at a particular time, day, venue.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Dalzell 1955: 26-28; Quinn 1982: 159 and Lowrie 2009: 252 are also among those connecting the library with *recitationes*. More generally, see White 1993: 293: “Temples and probably the new state libraries contained open areas suitable for use as auditoriums, and it is not impossible that poets sometimes gave readings there [. . .] But in fact we cannot verify a single case in which a solo performance before an invited audience took place in a temple or public library.” It is nevertheless an attractive thought that the relatively small, intimate space in front of the steps of the Magna Mater temple on the Palatine (at most accommodating a couple of thousand spectators: see Goldberg 1998) could have hosted the kind of recitation mentioned by Servius. Most recently, van Sickle 2011: 30: “Virgil must have listened to others and himself recited, you can even dare to guess, in various libraries or great halls (*atria*) of houses in the privileged neighborhood atop the Palatine hill.”

⁹⁶ Dalzell 1955: 26. cf. Quinn 1982: 159: “‘all interested are welcome’ is perhaps the appropriate paraphrase, rather than ‘to an invited audience’ (as the phrase is often translated), which implies individual invitations.”

⁹⁷ Cf. Winsbury 2009: 97 arguing that Seneca meant “the formal and regular readings. . . at an advertised date and time to an invited audience . . . as opposed to . . . informal and *ad hoc* extempore public readings.”

On the same wavelength with Servius is the Vergilian *Life* of Aelius Donatus, the influential *grammaticus* of mid-fourth century C.E. Rome. Once again the focus is the immensely favorable contemporary reception of the poet's *Eclogues*, albeit this time taken as a group, the “Bucolics”:

Bucolica eo successu edidit,⁹⁸ ut in scaena quoque per cantores crebro
pronuntiarentur⁹⁹

He published the *Bucolics* with such success that even on stage singers delivered them frequently (*Vita Suetonii Vulgo Donatiana* 26; trans. Wilson-Okamura and Ziolkowski in Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 192)

Given the “layers of fictional biography and criticism” that “rapidly formed around Virgil, and other admired poets,”¹⁰⁰ is there any conceivable value in this shard of

⁹⁸ See Clausen 1994: xxii: “since all ten [sc. eclogues] were published together, all ten are, in a sense, contemporaneous ... Until he finally relinquished his book, Virgil was free to make changes in it – revising adding, deleting lines — wherever he pleased.”

⁹⁹ Habinek 2005: 282 n78 understands *pronuntiare* as “a technical term for the performance of actors,” citing Varro *Ling.* 6.58 and Plin. *Ep.* 5.19.3-6, a passage distinguishing “simple oral reading” (*legere*) from “performance via impersonation” (*pronuntiare*). I agree with Allen 1972: 5 n12 that “only one *cantor* performed at a time, although possibly several successively on the same occasion.” As a professional title, “cantor” signifies “someone who gives public vocal performances” (Tuplin 1979: 358 n5 with references).

information from the fourth century C.E.? The issue is, to say the least, contentious, yet the “prevalent” scholarly opinion deems that Donatus' *Vita* “coincides largely with the original of Suetonius”¹⁰¹ dating from the beginning of the second century C.E. and included in the now lost section *De Poetis* (*On Poets*) of his treatise *De uiris illustribus* (*On famous men*). Despite the “generations of romantic fancy” (Fantham 2013: 85) that could have accumulated in the century that separates Vergil from Suetonius,¹⁰² the fact that Suetonius, a man in high government position, “must have had unfettered access to the whole imperial archive,”¹⁰³ cannot be lightly dismissed. What he writes may not be the truth but he would have known enough¹⁰⁴ to expunge something so preposterous as to

¹⁰⁰ Fantham 2013: 84. Even so, Fantham (*ibid.* 86) does not seem to dismiss the report that the *Eclogues* “were often sung *per cantores* on the stage, which would bring the poems to a wider audience.”

¹⁰¹ Stok 2010: 108; cf. Horsfall 1995a: 3 on the *Vita* being “rather Suetonius', essentially unaltered”; Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 180.

¹⁰² Cf. Fantham *ibid.* 297 n16. The question of Suetonius' reliability is considered by Horsfall 1995a. In his latest reference to the subject, Horsfall 2016: 32 designates the stage performances mentioned by Suetonius/Donatus as “wonderfully credible in themselves.”

¹⁰³ See Stok 2010: 108; cf. Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 163.

¹⁰⁴ For White 2005: 337 “Suetonius was uniquely placed to know the role of poetry under the Principate.”

not even *look* like the truth!¹⁰⁵ The most important crux, however, is bound to remain elusive, as it is impossible to ascertain what exactly is meant by the biographer's *edidit*.

Does *edere* refer to the publication of a work as a unified volume, a book, the way we understand publication/edition today?¹⁰⁶ Could it be the ancient equivalent of an author's "complimentary copies," intended "to be "given out" (*edere*) or "sent out" (*emittere*) to whomever the author considered appropriate"?¹⁰⁷ For Quinn *edere* marks out "the completion of the gestatory process,"¹⁰⁸ while Valette-Cagnac, without excluding the meaning of publication, opts for the more general sense of "bringing forth," "bringing into the world," "bringing to light," "give birth to," "make known."¹⁰⁹ Whether the *scaena* and its idioms intrude into the channel of communication between Vergil and his addressees *post* publication or in the course of an indeterminate period of the work being gradually "made public" through recitals or in fact at any intermediate point in the

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Feeney 2016: 190 on anecdotes and the value of considering "at the very least" their testimony to what "was thinkable for later generations."

¹⁰⁶ See Feeney 2016: 192 on Ennius as the very first to use the verb *edere* in Latin "in the sense of 'publish/make public,' corresponding to the technical Greek term ἐκδιδόναι." For Feeney *ibid.*: 195 "Ennius' new epic acquired its social power through its dissemination as a text."

¹⁰⁷ Wiseman 2015: 5.

¹⁰⁸ Quinn 1982: 144n224.

¹⁰⁹ See Valette-Cagnac 1997: 142-43. Cf. Johnson 2010: 53: "'Publishing' (*emittere*, *edere*) was simply the offer to let others copy your literary work without stipulating that they keep it to themselves."

process¹¹⁰ is impossible to ascertain. Irrespective of the meaning of *edere*, however, in both Servius and Donatus/Suetonius the endpoint of the journey is Rome's entertainment industry, a public performance by professionals of the stage-world, whether Cytheris herself or an anonymous line of *cantores*.

The connotations of “vulgarization of the literary product” attending *recitatio*¹¹¹ notwithstanding, the notion of a single Eclogue or even the book of the *Eclogues* “recited” does not offend our sense of cultural propriety in the same way that the coupling of Cytheris with Vergil does, so, on the whole, there seems to have been less of a problem about accepting it.¹¹² It is entirely plausible that at least part of the collection

¹¹⁰ Parker's position (2009: 202) that “the staging of poetry by people other than the author could only have occurred after there was an independently circulating, written text” is foolproof on the basis of today's experience, but the dividing lines cannot have been drawn so hard and fast in the Roman world. Parker *ibid.* n 56 draws support from Donatus' *edidit*, but the precise meaning of the verb is far too uncertain to support further conclusions, especially not ‘absolute’ conclusions.

¹¹¹ Conte 1994: 405, fully quoted **above, p.x.**

¹¹² See, for example, Stok 2010: 115, where Servius' story is branded as “very unlikely,” whereas Donatus/Suetonius' information is accepted: “The custom of public recitations began in the Augustan age, and was introduced by Asinius Pollio. It is therefore not impossible that the *Eclogues* were in fact delivered with success on stage, as *VSD* 26 claims” (although authorial recitation does not imply a seamless transition to delivery by actors onstage). Bell 1999: 266 brands Servius' information “unreliable” but readily concedes that “some of the *Eclogues* were certainly incorporated into the performative

would have seen the light of day piece-meal in instalments.¹¹³ It is only when we start envisaging the *recitatio*/stage-performance sequence as a linear progression¹¹⁴ that we

repertoire of the stage, including mimes, which flourished as popular entertainment at this time.” Van Sickle 2004: xxxii rejects Servius' anecdote as “scholiastic fancy”, but is happy to endorse (*ibid.* xxii) Suetonius/Donatus; he also takes Martindale (1997: 119) to task for “gloss[ing] over the report that the *Bucolics* were issued with such success as to be performed frequently by actors in the theater” (van Sickle 1998). Cf. van Sickle 2011: 7 “Gossip handed down since Virgil's day reports that the *Bucolics* scored an instant success on stage. Alone of Virgil's works these ten short pieces early caught the theater public's ear and eye. They made their poet a celebrity.” Horsfall 1995b: 249 regards Suetonius' testimony as “unquestionable” but notes that Servius “cannot be quoted in support” of it. Even Parker 2009: 202, who ferociously opposes Servius' story, is milder on Donatus' information: “Despite the fact (if it is a fact) that the *Eclogues* were put on stage ...”. At the other end of the spectrum, scholars who do not problematize any among our scraps of information can use the “musical quality of the *Eclogues* . . . to explain the intriguing fact that soon after its publication parts of the collection were performed on stage” (Morgan 2000: 365; my emphasis).

¹¹³ Coleman 1977: 15 “ . . . it is reasonable to suppose that the poems were first published individually or in pairs, each with a title and a dedication . . . This piecemeal publication of the *Bucolica* accounts perhaps for the alternative name *Eclogae*: each poem was an *eklogé* ‘excerpt, extract’ from a projected whole.” Cf. Fantham 2013: 87.

¹¹⁴ Valette-Cagnac 1997: 160 refers to two distinct stages in the diffusion of the *Eclogues*, signaled by *recitare/edere* and *cantare/pronuntiare per cantores* respectively.

become uneasy. For we expect *recitare* to pave the way for *publicare* or *emittere*, as nicely outlined in Pliny's *Letters*, our richest source for the workings of *recitatio* in Rome.¹¹⁵ Although the *recitatio* of a literary work is the single momentous event that unleashes the process of dissemination,¹¹⁶ the endpoint of this process is meant to be the relative fixity of a text circulating among as many readers as possible.¹¹⁷ Servius' and Suetonius' testimonies, on the other hand, indicate a process whereby the fluidity of the “work-in-progress” that is still the *recitatio*¹¹⁸ evolves into even greater fluidity, the totally unbounded, unpoliced, unconstrained, unchaperoned product taken to the stage.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ For the sequence from *recitare* to *publicare/emittere* as two distinct stages, see, e.g., Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.2 (*recitaret publicaretque*); 2.10.6, where Pliny's addressee is advised to “give readings” (*recita*) as an incitement to publication (*emittere*); 5.12.1, etc.

¹¹⁶ See Valette-Cagnac 1997: 156; cf. *ibid.*: 153 on *recitatio* constituting the key stage or “birth certificate” (*acte de naissance*) of a literary text.

¹¹⁷ Of course textual stability in the modern sense was practically impossible: every further copy made of a text publicly released would have been unique and possibly different, even if in minor ways, from all others.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Parker 2009: 208 on *recitatio* as “only the penultimate draft of a work in progress”; Winsbury 2009: 99 on *recitatio* as involving “new works on the verge of completion”; the published text incorporates audience reactions to the recited version: see, e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 5.3.9-10, 8.21.6, 7.17 (defending multiple recitations / revisions before publication).

¹¹⁹ This is not to imply that circulation in the form of a finished written product, a book, guarantees to the author a substantially firmer amount of control over his own creation.

If Donatus/Suetonius' *edere* does not refer to book publication but oral dissemination, both the *VSD* and Servius map out a comparable trajectory from *recitatio* style, author-centered performance to performance controlled and owned by professionals of the stage in an indeterminable degree of closeness to or departure from the original, the author's own work (cf. §3). Our tendency is to demur, and yet there is, I argue, in both Servius and Suetonius, a self-consistent logic worth further probing.

In both cases the stage-life of the *Eclogue(s)* is presented as the outcome of remarkable success at the point of the author's initial contact with a public of listeners (or possibly, in Suetonius' case, readers). For the trajectory from successful *recitatio* to professionally executed stage-rendition to make the best possible sense, we may have to assume something altogether different from the *recitatio* as a “lieu de production” where the literary moment is *being created*, as Valette-Cagnac (1997: 138) puts it. The exclusive literary “workshop,” where a select circle of invited friends, peers and equals,¹²⁰ in a private or semi-private setting would listen to a poet's work and help him iron out his last remaining trouble-spots by means of learned criticism and well-informed suggestions,¹²¹ would have been unlikely to generate the level of excitement around a

As Farrell 2009 argues, in Catullus' case at least, “the image of the physical book is associated not only with permanence” but also “with the alienation of the poet's work from his control” (183). Oliensis 1995 and Fear 2000 are seminal.

¹²⁰ Or “genetic readers,” as Gurd 2012 calls them, “participat[ing] in a process in which the text remains in flux” (115).

¹²¹ For a most illuminating insight into the purpose and value of learned criticism at a private recitation, see Horace, *Ars P.* 438-52; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 5.3.8-11, 7.17.1-2, 8.21.4,

work, the fever pitch and buzz that would help propel it to the public world of professional production on the stage, in the hands of *virtuosi*. Of course, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that we are standing on quicksand. If Cytheris was actually the star of *Eclogue* 6 in its stage version, it is not inconceivable that her special position within the group of Gallus' poetic friends (the exclusive audience of Vergil's *recitatio*?) would have been enough to ensure she knew the work (it paid the handsomest tribute to her lover after all). Even if it had only been presented in a closed setting, without any circulation of the text, she could have been encouraged (by Gallus himself?) to transpose it to her own artistic medium (cf. §3). But if we were to accord no special weight to Cytheris' twin networks of poetry and power, the most reasonable inference from Servius' and Suetonius' information remains that a recital or series of recitals in front of an audience large and diverse enough to serve as testing ground acted as a stimulus, an enticement for those keen to seize a bargain, a commercial opportunity: poetry that could find enormous appeal at recitation stage, could be tipped to hit 'big time' when expertly spruced up for stage performance — in our contemporary parlance, it could 'go viral.'¹²²

8.21.6; see Roller 1998: esp. 293 on the audience's obligation to assist in the creative process.

¹²² Cf. Quinn 1982: 153 on Servius and Suetonius together: "What they suggest is initial performance by the poet himself (or perhaps a series of such performances) before an audience large enough to justify Servius' *ingenti favore recitata*, followed by a performance in the theater by a professional interpreter, or by professional interpreters." Cf. van Sickle 2004: xxiv (on Suetonius / Donatus): "Success in recitations . . . might catch the interest of those able and eager to promote frequent repetitions, also in the

While the *ingens favor* of a circle comprising intellectuals of the standing of Propertius and Horace, Macer, Ponticus and Bassus (the dream audience of Ovid's youth — *Tr.* 4.10.41-54) is nowhere close to anticipating with any certainty the reaction of the raucous theater audiences Horace loves complaining about,¹²³ enthusiastic approval on the part of a less exclusive, broader-based, non-expert audience could have offered huge encouragement to savvy *cantores* and mime stars to re-calibrate the material for a theater spectacular.¹²⁴ The underlying logic is defended in Pliny's *Ep.* 7.17, where Pliny argues that reciting to a larger audience (*pluribus*, 8; *multis*, 9), even if this comprises the “unlearned” (*indoctis*, 9), is a more efficient (and more nerve-wracking) testing ground for the perfectionist writer than reading to a couple of friends or a single individual, “however well-informed” (*quamlibet docto*, 8-9):

Opinor, quia in numero ipso est quoddam magnum collatumque consilium,
quibusque singulis iudicii parum, omnibus plurimum.

theater.” Indeed, van Sickle *ibid.*: xxvi proposes it is worth our searching the *Eclogues* for “features apt to strike that susceptible public, whether we suppose it assembled in some great atrium, library hall, or the vast unruly theater, not in any case just a solitary reader curled up with a scroll.”

¹²³ See, e.g., *Epist.* 2.1.182-86, 199-204.

¹²⁴ The logic is essentially the same behind Hollywood test-screenings, used to determine whether a film is of a “must-see magnitude” (Shone 2004: 288); a disastrous test-screening is usually confirmed with a bust at the tills.

I imagine it is because there is some sort of sound collective wisdom in mere numbers, so that, though individual judgements may be poor, when combined they carry weight (*Ep.* 7.17.10-11; trans. B. Radice 1969)

The larger the testing sample the stronger the likelihood that its reaction will be an accurate indicator of the way the broader public may respond. And he adduces the example of the tragic poet Pomponius Secundus, who had so much “faith in public opinion” ([*t*] *antum ille populo dabat*) that he used to emend contentious parts of his work after “appealing to the people” (“*Ad populum prouoco*”), that is after inviting and reading to the general public (11-12). Afterall, “all those who write with the aim to please will write the kind of things they see have given pleasure” (*Omnes enim, qui placendi causa scribunt, qualia placere uiderint scribent*, Pliny, *Ep.* 3.18.10).

Even though the likelihood is slim that Vergil himself was one of the poets eager to have their work regularly reviewed (*considerari*) by the crowds (*a uulgo*), as Cicero puts it,¹²⁵ or recite no matter where and to no matter who, as Horace sneers,¹²⁶ it is important to bear in mind that the availability of such a broad, non-select, indiscriminate public as an

¹²⁵ Cic. *De Off.* 1.147, the idea being that figurative artists as well as poets welcome the chance to test new work on the wider public: whatever that public disapproves of collectively (*si quid reprehensum sit a pluribus*) will have to be corrected (*id corrigatur*). On this passage see Gurd 2012: 68-69. The implication is the same as in Servius' extract: a broad audience functions as a crucial testing ground and its stamp of approval (or, for that matter, disapproval) is indicative of the chances of further popularity.

¹²⁶ See Hor. *Sat.* 1.4. 73-74.

audience of poetic works is taken for granted by both Cicero and Horace.¹²⁷ Indeed the fashion, the trend that Horace himself is proud to buck, is to *not* hold oneself on reserve for “select” audiences but to “give readings” (*recitare*) of one's writings “in the packed theaters” (*spissis . . . theatris*) instead (*Epist.* 1.19.41-42).¹²⁸ “Don't toil so that the crowds might wonder at you, be satisfied with few readers” (*neque te ut miretur turba labores, | contentus paucis lectoribus*, *Sat.* 1.10.73-74), Horace preaches, but the open-mouthed admiration of the mob is precisely what the majority of literary wannabes (irrespective of quality) crave for, the public recitation being their only chance of possibly obtaining it. The paucity of secure evidence on recitation activity on the part of ‘big names’ in Roman literary history should not lead us to believe that the hordes of versifiers, including the hopeless aspirants to a successful poetic career,¹²⁹ did not have the inclination, need as well as opportunity to exhibit their wares to the crowds in a fully public space. A century later, when Pliny ridicules a political rival's recitation of his deceased young son's eulogy to a huge public audience (*Ep.* 4.7.2) or when he refers condescendingly to Silius Italicus' occasional airing of his work at public recitation (*Ep.*

¹²⁷ And, of course, later on by Juvenal and Persius, the latter satirizing contemporary poetasters who skip all stages of editorial screening to turn *recitatio* in public (*populo*, *P.* 1.15) into “the poem's world premiere!” (Freudenburg 2001:160).

¹²⁸ Or indeed in the middle of the forum or in the baths, as in Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.74-75. Of course, the fashion may have been fueled by necessity for all those second-rate poets who never enjoyed the financial security of Maecenas' patronage. They would not have had the luxury of avoiding recital to the throngs (*volgo recitare*), as Horace does (*Sat.* 1.4.23).

¹²⁹ Cf. Horace's *indocti doctique*, unqualified and qualified alike, in *Epist.* 2.1.117.

3.7.5-6), his rejections reveal more about common practice than his endorsements.¹³⁰ As Wiseman (1982: 36) has often claimed, “the Roman populace listened, or had the opportunity to listen, to a lot more poetry than we think,” the theater being “where Roman poets normally found their primary audience” (Wiseman 2016: 148).¹³¹

What can all this ultimately tell us about Vergil and his getting the *Eclogue(s)* into public circulation? In terms of hard evidence nothing at all. However, even the mere concession that the initial audience(s) of the *Eclogues* could have been larger than the élite groups we routinely conjure on the basis of Pliny's writings is important in itself, for it brings us significantly closer to the more suspect part of Servius' account than we would care to admit.

A *recitatio* was not an uncontested site nor was it exempt from the perils attending all male élite performance in the ancient world. Not unlike the élite *declamatio*, whose furthest outposts of legitimacy border on *actio* and, even worse, *saltatio*,¹³² recitation too teetered on a brink, “always on the verge of becoming theater” (Dupont 1997: 51),

¹³⁰ Our gratitude to Pliny for his ample, multi-colored sketches on poetic recitation has blinded us to the fact that his tableau is not descriptive but, actually, prescriptive. As Johnson 2010: 35 has put it, “We should entertain the possibility that Pliny may not be so much ‘creating a picture’ of a world that exists as *constructing* a picture of the world as he wishes it to exist.” (emphasis in the original)

¹³¹ Cf. Wiseman 1982: 36: “The evidence is unobtrusive and therefore usually disregarded, but it exists and to ignore it is to misunderstand the profession of letters in Rome.”

¹³² See **n. 121** below.

courting the risk of eliciting and succumbing to the “more vulgar pleasures” of the stage (Barchiesi 2005: 62). Not only did large-scale recitations inevitably rely “on the visual as well as oral impressiveness of the speaker” (Winsbury 2009: 107), they also “brought poets before a live audience which could bestow on them something analogous to the acclaim which musicians, dancers and actors already enjoyed” (White 1993: 60). Even when a *recitatio* is held among like-minded peers, its dynamics may well collapse the cognitive tasks appropriate to recitation hall and theater alike. The trained reciter who, as Pliny claims, can make inferences from his audience's unspoken, corporeal language (their “expressions, glances, nods, applause, murmurs and silence,” *ex vultu oculis nutu manu murmure silentio*, *Ep.* 5.3.9), finds his counterpart in the pantomime viewer who can piece the *fabula* together by scrutinizing the non-linguistic signs conveyed through the dancer's “gesture, nod, leg, knee, hand and spin” (*gestu, nutu, crure, genu, manu, rotatu*, *Sid. Apoll. Carm.* 23.269-70).

If Vergil's audience had been larger than could be accommodated in, say, a rich friend's villa, the *ingens favor* it bestowed on the poet may not have been dissimilar to the visceral, lascivious response Juvenal attributes to Statius' admirers, a “rock concert” style reception. When Statius recites his “darling” or “mistress” *Thebaid*,¹³³ the crowd rushes (*curritur*) to his seductive, pleasing voice (*vocem iucundam*); the whole scene is swimming in desire.¹³⁴

¹³³ Juv. 7.82-83: *carmen amicae* | *Thebaidos*. See Bartsch 1994: 132 on *amica*

“confus[ing] the entities of poem and mistress.”

¹³⁴ And is expressed in well-calculated satirical exaggeration, having appropriated the most suggestive vocabulary of elegiac love poetry; see Bartsch 1994: 132. Persius'

tanta dulcedine captos
 adficit ille animos tantaque libidine volgi
 auditur. (Juv. 7.84-86)

by such sweetness are captured the souls he moves, with such desire is he heard by
 the crowd.

Given the subject matter of several among the *Eclogues*, an erotically tinged response by an audience indiscriminately pooled together would not have seemed out of place. Indeed, some four centuries beyond their publication, Vergil's "lovemaking words" (*amatoria uerba*) from his "bucolic verses" (*bucolicorum versuum*) were being learnt and sung (*cantare*) by liberal minded priests as the love-i-tunes of the day, to the dismay of St Jerome (*Ep.* 21.13.9), who would rather have ministers pore over the gospels and the prophets.¹³⁵ A successful recitation capable of winning a public over would probably have had to be a case of playing with fire only not getting burnt, walking up to the edges of acceptability without actually crossing the line. There would have been no need for any "[e]laborate precautions . . . to avoid tainting the poet-performer with the *infamia* of the actor" (Parker 2009: 203) if the divide between poet/reciter and stage actor were not an

intensely "pornographic" (Freudenburg 2001: 162) take on public recitation in *Satire* 1.15-21, where the effeminate (*fractus*) and lecherous (*patranti . . . ocello*) reciter's songs penetrate the listeners' loins (*carmina lumbum | intrant*), may be responding to a set of social and performative conditions that would not have obtained in Vergil's Rome.

¹³⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* 21.13.9. Cf. Horsfall 1995b: 250.

extremely fine one,¹³⁶ the reciter finding himself constantly caught between “the Scylla and Charybdis of expressivity and severity” (Habinek 2005: 214). On the merits or demerits of Vergil as a performer (e.g. in *VSD* 28-29) it is impossible to speculate without having recourse to dubious evidence. Moreover, the danger of circularity in thought and argument is of the highest order at this point. But, if a *recitatio* was of the kind capable of attracting enormous public approval, its raw material was probably of the kind that *could* be easily transformed into a show-stopper, a block-buster triumph on the stage, which is precisely what I will turn my attention to next.

It is unfortunate that our less contentious evidence on Vergil adapted and spectacularized comes from after Vergil's death,¹³⁷ when he had already been transformed

¹³⁶ As Habinek 2005: 213 argues, Pliny's description of “his own participation in recitation” throughout his *Letters* reveals him as “one who successfully and continually negotiates the boundaries between text and body, body and voice, play and seriousness, virtuosity and severity [. . .] In effect, Pliny tells us, the recitation hall invites an expressivity and sensuality of behavior that its very conventions make it difficult to supply.”

¹³⁷ A very fuzzy, ill-defined occasion of a ‘theatrical’ Vergil in the alleged presence of Vergil himself we have in Tacitus (*Dial.* 13.2-3): upon hearing “verses of Vergil” (*Vergilii uersibus*) “in the theater” (*in theatro*), the audience rose to their feet as one man and paid homage to the poet who “happened to be present” (*forte praesentem*) and “watching” (*spectantemque*). The greatest *faux pas* would be to use Servius and Donatus/Suetonius to corroborate the suggestion that the ‘theatrical’ Vergil Tacitus is referring to is the *Eclogues*. So does Dupont 1997: 46 n5, who thinks the performed

into a ‘classic.’ The evidence here is relatively well known,¹³⁸ so a brief exposition will suffice. Suetonius (*Ner.* 54) records Nero's openly proclaimed wish to dance (*saltaturum*) Vergil's *Turnus* (*Vergili Turnum*) on the public stage, a story to which I will return. Lucian (*Salt.* 46) includes “the wanderings of Aeneas and the love of Dido” among established pantomime topics; Augustine (*Serm.* 241.5 = *PL* 38. 1135-36.) refers to his flock's knowledge of Aeneas' underworld adventure — knowledge found not “in books” (*in libris*) but, deplorably, acquired in the theater (*in theatris*). Also in the fifth century, Macrobius endows Dido's tragic love with the wonderful capacity of a pop ‘hit’ to

Vergilian verses are “most likely the *Bucolics*, complete with singing and dancing”, and reasons: “We have testimony to such an occurrence in Suetonius' *Life of Virgil* . . . and in Servius' note on *Buc.* 6.11.” As Hörschele 2013: 45 rightly perceives, “*nothing* ties” the episode “to the *Eclogues* in particular”; it most probably refers “to a presentation of Vergilian poetry or just to a few lines quoted in the context of something entirely different”. For Horsfall 1995b: 249: “Tributes to fame and *verecundia* should at very least awaken disquiet,” turning Tacitus' story into material possibly necessary “to jettison”. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to bear in mind that the effectiveness of Maternus' rhetorical positioning at this particular point in Tacitus' *Dialogue* relies on the confluence between Vergil and the stage striking his target audience as entirely plausible — not in the slightest bit absurd.

¹³⁸ See primarily Panayotakis 2008, including a brief enlightening discussion of Cytheris and the Sixth *Eclogue*; Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 162-66.

penetrate the recipient's mind surreptitiously, lodge itself therein and colonise it,¹³⁹ so much so that, crossing the lines between diverse expressive media and conquering all, “the story of Dido's passion” (*fabula lasciuientis Didonis*) becomes the subject of choice, circulating freely among artists:

ita pro uero per ora omnium uolitet, ut pictores fectoresque et qui figmentis liciorum
contextas imitantur effigies, hac materia uel maxime in effigiandis simulacris
tamquam unico argumento decoris utantur,
so wings its way, as truth, through the lips of all men, that painters and sculptors
and those who represent human figures in tapestry take it for their theme in
preference to any other, when they fashion their likenesses, as if it were the one
subject in which they can display their artistry; (Macrobius, *Sat.* 5.17.5; trans.
Davies 1969)

Final stop the theater, the fare of stage professionals:

nec minus histrionum perpetuis et gestibus et cantibus celebretur
nor is [Dido's story] extoled to a lesser degree by means of the actors' perpetual
gestures and songs (Macrobius, *Sat.* 5.17.5; my trans).¹⁴⁰

In addition, Tilg (2010: 288-91) has made an eminently plausible suggestion regarding possible pantomime adaptations of *Aeneid* 4 performed in first-century C.E. Aphrodisias,

¹³⁹ See Frith 2001: 96 on pop music as “a source of sounds that chime unexpectedly but deeply in our lives.”

¹⁴⁰ The special super-stardom of “Dido and Aeneas” (albeit as favorite reading matter) is already attested by Ovid: no part of the entire *Aeneid* is “more read” (*legitur . . . magis*) than that union of illicit love (*Tr.* 2.535-36).

the Carian city that received freedom, privileges and direct imperial patronage under Augustus' rule largely on the basis of its distinct mythological connection with Aphrodite / Venus, the mother of Aeneas and chosen ancestress of the Julio-Claudian family. Pantomime versions of episodes from the *Aeneid*, a literary project so close to Augustus' heart, would have made perfect sense in Aphrodisias' thriving theatrical culture. Most importantly, they would have dovetailed with another, albeit retrospective, gesture of homage to Augustus' own theatrical tastes, namely the inclusion of close-mouthed, that is to say pantomimic, masks in the sculptural decoration of the Sebasteion (Jory 2002), the impressive temple complex that was part of a massive imperial programme of building reconstruction in the city.¹⁴¹ In Tilg's view (2010: 289), a Dido pantomime, which Chariton could have watched in his home town of Aphrodisias, may well have influenced his shaping of his own love story in his *Callirhoe* romance and may explain this text's striking points of similarity with the Vergilian “Dido and Aeneas” plot.

What is the value of these slim pickings, scattered far and wide both geographically as well as chronologically? None of this qualifies as factual, objective evidence — all such information is mired in each writer's rhetorical agenda. However, two safe points can be made. On the one hand, the larger picture that takes shape over the course of five centuries is unmistakable: Vergil is not just slipping ‘in’ and ‘out’ of popular culture —

¹⁴¹ Although inscriptional evidence indicates that the Sebasteion itself “was most probably started or decided upon under Tiberius and finished under Nero” (Smith 1987: 90), the Sebasteion sculptural reliefs “play out live political issues concerning not only the body of Augustus, but also the legacy of that paradigmatic body for Augustus' latter-day Julio-Claudian imperial successors” (Squire 2015: 314).

he *is* the stuff of popular culture.¹⁴² On the other hand, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that Vergil's fortunes in later antiquity do not 'tell all' about Vergil's fortunes in his own lifetime. Neither Macrobius' nor Augustine's danced versions of Dido's love and Aeneas' descent into the underworld constitute proof that a 'Dido and Aeneas' dance was performed in Republican Rome or, even less, that a Vergilian *Eclogue* was performed by Cytheris. They do nevertheless suggest the *congeniality* of Vergil's verse with the performance medium¹⁴³ and therefore corroborate the plausibility of a block-buster vernacular Vergil. Standing on the shoulders of Macrobius or Augustine and looking back to the Republican picture adumbrated by Servius, what we can see is not Parker's "farrago" but one of the earliest instances of cultural (re)appropriation of Vergil, the fledglings of what we might call a Virgil cultural industry. Dismissing Servius' story is equivalent to throwing away with both hands precious material relating to Vergil's protean ability to thrive in diverse cultural frameworks; accepting its plausibility means gaining some of the earliest signs of Vergil's long-term cultural success, the earliest indications that the Vergilian product was destined to have inexhaustible potential and enormous cultural currency in popular culture for centuries to come — in our time we would be talking of marketability, commercial value. Perhaps our best chance of catching a fleeting glimpse of the cultural diet on offer to a circle significantly broader than the educated élites in Vergil's time is to pay attention to the intriguing Vergilian graffiti

¹⁴² Cf. Levine's assessment of Shakespeare's position in American culture: "Shakespeare was popular entertainment in nineteenth-century America" (Levine 1988: 21).

¹⁴³ For Horsfall 2016: 32 this later cluster of evidence for theater shows based on Vergilian matter "supports" the information in *VSD* 26.

found on Pompeian walls, as these contain some fourteen quotations from the *Eclogues*, chosen not on the basis of their thematic or narrative importance but on account of their linguistic or gnomic value independently of their original context.¹⁴⁴ As Milnor (2014: 262) writes on the entire corpus,

long before the production of the cantos and the thorough atomization of Virgil by the third-and fourth-century grammarians, it is clear that Virgil's works had been broken down in the digestive system of Roman popular culture.

How much of what we can read in the graffiti goes back to the writers' schoolday memories of Vergil and how much is owed “to the impact of public performances,” a debt “not usually recognised,”¹⁴⁵ is rather impossible to gauge. But, as Horsfall (1995b: 252) muses: “You do not even have to be literate to remember a verse from the theatre and to ask a friend to write it on the wall.”

§3. A culture of adaptation

I would now like to start interrogating our evidence from the viewpoint not of the poets themselves but of those who “competed with poets for public notice” (White 1993: 49), the “host of performers, entrepreneurs, tradesmen, and consultants who serviced the arts” (White 1993: 49). More specifically I want to turn the limelight on the *virtuosi* belonging to the stage world, the stage-professionals responsible for the cultural fare presented at the *ludi scaenici* and any other public occasion using the stage as a platform. For *they*, actors, vocalists, musicians, dancers, alongside “all who wielded influence over

¹⁴⁴ See Milnor 2014: 259.

¹⁴⁵ See Horsfall 1995b: 251.

conditions of performance or publicity” (White 1993: 49) were the ones who made it all happen. And there was rather a lot of it! As Wiseman (2015: 92-93) writes,

It is obviously impossible, from such fragmentary and haphazard evidence, to offer any kind of confident reconstruction of what went on at the *ludi scaenici*, every year from 55 BC onwards, on that enormous stage in Pompey's theatre. But I think it is reasonable to make two suggestions. First: what was needed to fill the space was not words alone but music and dance as well. And second: any poet who hoped to reach those tens of thousands in the theatre audience would have to write with the new conditions in mind.

To put the matter very simply, and as closely as possible to this piece's central concern: Cytheris and her artistic brethren needed poetic fodder for their fully-fledged theatrical performances, otherwise the entire entertainment industry in which they lived, breathed and apparently excelled would run out of fuel and grind to a halt. Singers needed lyrics for their songs, poetry to be set to music; dancers needed some kind of plots or varsity numbers to dance, increasingly so as the genre of pantomime dancing was coming into being. Where did the ample material required to service stage-bound ‘traffic’ ultimately come from? The evidence may be chequered and insufficient but certainly not hopeless.

In the first place there was obviously a body of works specifically composed for the stage. By this I do not mean traditional tragedy and comedy, for which there is no clear sign of significant original activity in the late Republic, but rather poetry composed for the pantomime stage, the libretti accompanying the dancers' productions, the so-called *fabulae salticae*. We know that Lucan and Statius composed them in the first century C.E., the latter for good money, his “virgin” *Agave* (*intactam . . . Agaven*) having been

sold to (and perhaps even been commissioned by) none other but the illustrious pantomime Paris.¹⁴⁶ At the time of Vergil himself Philonides, an apparently well-known singer/kitharode *cum* librettist, is associated with the star dancer Bathyllus. Crinagoras, a Greek epigrammatist who made his career in Rome around the middle of the first-century B.C.E., urges him to give free vent to his talent; no shortcuts are required, everything is possible for the virtuoso Bathyllus on stage:

Θάρσει καὶ τέτταρσι διαπласθέντα προσώποις
 μῦθον καὶ τούτων γράψαι ἔτι πλέοσιν.
 οὔτε σὲ γὰρ λείψουσι, Φιλωνίδη, οὔτε Βάθυλλον,
 τὸν μὲν ἀοιδάων, τὸν δὲ χερῶν χάριτες.

Take heart, Philonides, and compose a plotline to accommodate four parts or even more; for grace will never be in short supply neither for you nor for Bathyllus: in your case this is grace in singing, in his case grace in the motion of his hands.

(*Greek Anthology* 9.542)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Lucan: the so-called “Vacca” life attributes 14 *fabulae salticae* to him. Statius: Juv. 7. 87. If Hardie 1983: 62-63 is right that Statius' career may have suffered between *ca* 83 to 89/90 C.E. because of his close association with Paris (murdered in 83 C.E. for his adultery with Domitia), this association may have extended to the provision of a steady stream of libretti besides *Agave*.

¹⁴⁷ As Garelli 2007: 149 notes, the exact speciality of Philonides cannot be pinpointed with precision, but it is plausible that the early pantomimes accosted top artists, “des artistes-vedettes” to such an extent that the beginnings of the genre could be traced to

It is highly conceivable that VIP performers of the ilk of Bathyllus and Paris would have been in a position to seek out an exquisite marriage of movement with intricately crafted verse (cf. §4).¹⁴⁸ The stigma attached to the stage, including stage-bound work for the more popular genres, means that we would not necessarily have known if, say, Bathyllus had commissioned libretti from Vergil and Ovid, possessed by the same entrepreneurial and adventurous spirit that drove Diaghilev to commission Jean Cocteau with the libretti for the Russian Ballet's *Parade* and *Train Bleu*. Extremely unlikely though it seems and certainly is, the *e silentio* evidence is simply not foolproof enough to reassure us beyond a shadow of conceivable doubt that the Vergilian “Turnus” that Nero would have danced (§2) had not been, afterall, composed by Vergil himself.

Be that as it may, originally composed stage matter of high quality would not have gone very far to cover the needs of an entertainment-hungry public. Lesser lights of the dancing or the singing stage might have therefore gravitated happily enough to compositions of average quality, as long as they were (or could be refashioned as) choreographically viable. This is the implication of Libanius' comment (*Or.* 64.88) that

reciprocal exchanges between the luminaries of the mime and the lyrical world (*ibid.*

n.6). This is an astute suggestion that deserves further probing.

¹⁴⁸ Over the centuries of pantomime's reign and given the scarcity of evidence, it is impossible for us to separate ‘originals’ from ‘adaptations.’ Jory 2012 makes a compelling case for a brand new composition on the story of Astyanax: the librettist, a “real” poet (199) instead of an adapter, followed not the well-known Homeric or Euripidean (see *Troades*) version but accounts preserved by later sources which brought a mature Astyanax back to Troy as king.

pantomime fans are not lured to the theater by the promise of A-list songs — the songs fulfil an ancillary function, that is to say they support the dance. Would original production, even irrespective of quality, have been enough to satisfy the entertainment requirements of some 59 festive days per year in Augustus' time? Scarcely. Deficiencies would have needed to be remedied by adaptation. Both the texts of traditional stage-genres¹⁴⁹ and poetry not originally composed for the stage but with clear potential for

¹⁴⁹ Given pantomime's clearly signaled tragic affiliation (see, e.g., *IGR* 4.1272 where pantomime is designated as “tragic rhythmic movement,” τραγική ἔνρυθμος κείνησις or *IMagn.*192, 11-12 “rhythmical tragic poetry,” ἔνρυθμον τραγικὴν ποίησιν), the primary originals re-modeled as libretti would have been some of the most popular tragic masterpieces. Cf. Lucian, *Salt.* 31 (on common plots between tragedy and pantomime); *Lib. Or.* 64.112; *AP* 9. 248, 4 on Pylades' choreographic rendition of Dionysiac myth as having been executed “in accordance with the true canons of the servants of the tragic Muse”; *AP* 16. 289 (referring to a *fabula* based on Euripides' *Bacchae*?); Luc. *Salt.* 83-84 (*fabula* based on Sophocles' *Ajax*?); names of Euripidean (*Heracles*, *Orestes*, *Trojan Women*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus*) and Sophoclean (*Tympanistae*) tragedies are listed on an inscription (*CIL* XIV 4254, 199 C.E.) from Tivoli, listing successful roles of the second century C.E. dancing star L.Aurelius Apolaustus Memphius. Similarly, the inscriptions above two mask-holding figures on the sides of the celebratory marble altar from Lodi (now Milan) dedicated to the 2nd century C.E. pantomime Theocritus Pylades read “IONA” and “TROADAS” (*CIL* V 5889), commemorating the *fabulas* in which the dancer had been victorious. In this last case, however, Jory has admirably warned against the facile, natural assumption that *Troades* was a light adaptation of the Euripidean play

being reconfigured for grand-scale theatrical performance,¹⁵⁰ could have been re-mediated or re-calibrated by those more deeply involved in the stage-world, whether the performers (singers or dancers) themselves or a motley variety of “brokers,” mediators from the “page” to the “stage” (see **Section §4**). As White (1993: 53) puts it, in the late first century BC “scripts became vehicles for exhibitions of music and dance.”¹⁵¹

Our best chance for a glimpse of a commercial practice of stage-bound adaptation in early imperial Rome, a milieu wherein Servius' story can be most seamlessly ‘naturalized,’ is afforded by Ovid's exile poetry, notably two *prima facie* contradictory assertions. On the one hand he boasts his poems had often been danced (*saltata*) in Rome in public, often to the delight of the attending emperor himself.¹⁵² On the other, he

we know by the same name. One of the mask-bearing figures on the altar having been securely identified as Athena, a minor role in the Euripidean play itself, it follows that what Theocritus Pylades danced was not a straightforward adaptation of Euripides' *Troades* but either a radical re-casting of the plot in such a way as to create a central and memorable role for Athena or a new libretto altogether, dealing with the same part of the story but with the emphasis placed on different characters and episodes (Jory 2012: 192-93).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. White 2005: 323: “the demand for material was strong enough that even non-dramatic poetry was adapted for theatrical performances.”

¹⁵¹ Cf. White 1993: 59, claiming that “[a] few poets became known to theater audiences when their works were staged or were adapted for musical or balletic performances”.

¹⁵² *Tr.* 2. 519-20: *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe, | saepe oculos etiam detinuere tuos.*

confirms (and invokes his addressee's personal knowledge as testament to truth — “you know this yourself”) he has “composed nothing for the theaters,” his Muse being not “ambitious for applause.”¹⁵³

How can the author of a much acclaimed *Medea* disavow any writing for the stage? Where is the catch? What are we missing? No catch and nothing missed on our part; everything reads the way it should do. To the best of scholarly knowledge, Ovid did *not* write for what his fellow Romans, at the turn of the century, would have understood as “theater,” the “stage,” that being the space belonging to the block-buster genres, mimes and pantomimes. He *did* compose a *Medea* all right but no *litteras histrionicas*, no plots for the dancers, nothing of what made the “theater profitable for a poet” (*scaena . . . lucrosa poetae*, *Tr.* 2.507). Unknown others adapted his poems for the demands of a stage living off music, singing and dancing. Being inherently ‘theatrical,’ his works were flying, as it were, off the shelves, courtesy of those who could see the possibilities of dramatization. Like Quintilian and his fellow-rhetoricians who tightroped on a fine line of keeping the stage at arm's length yet absorbing its qualities, even if skin-deep,¹⁵⁴ Ovid is both sensible enough to drive a wedge between his poetry and indiscriminate histrionic fodder and sufficiently avid to capitalize on the continued visibility and popularity his poems' new life can mean for him in his exile, wherefrom any control of his reception is

¹⁵³ *Tr.* 5.7.27-28: *nil equidem feci (tu scis hoc ipse) theatris, | Musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est.*

¹⁵⁴ On the problematic boundary between Roman rhetoric and the stage, see (among a voluminous bibliography) the inspiring discussions of Richlin 1997, Gunderson 1998 and Fantham 2002.

literally impossible. Although part of what he tells us refers clearly to the past (*Tr.* 2.519-20), another part seems to imply that the adaptation trend shows no sign of abating in his absence: “you write to me, my friend, that my poems are being danced in a full house, and that my verses draw applause” (*carmina quod pleno saltari nostra theatro, | versibus et plaudi scribis, amice, meis, Tr.* 5.7.25-26). His poetry produces ever fresh off-shoots, an ever richer progeny.¹⁵⁵

Ovid adapted for the pantomime stage (or, more generally, Ovid “in converse with” the pantomime stage) is no longer headline news for classicists today.¹⁵⁶ The significance of Ovid’s perceived ownership, however, is seldom, if ever, commented upon. Ovid still refers to the danced adaptations of his verses as “my” poems; moreover, he implies that, despite their re-mediation, Augustus too has fully registered them as *his* poetic matter. In the same way that in the first century of Shakespeare’s reception “the concept of *Macbeth*, or of *Measure for Measure*, included broad areas of possibility and difference,

¹⁵⁵ At the same time no-one can actually *prove* that Ovid’s poems traveled to the stage in adapted form. What if excerpts from the *Metamorphoses* were co-opted into stage business as they stood, with no alteration? Cf. Dumont and Garelli 1998: 193. In the precarious state of our evidence, no room for dogmaticism exists.

¹⁵⁶ See Ingleheart 2008. For substantial readings of the *Metamorphoses* as informed by the materiality of the dancing body, see Lada-Richards 2013, 2016, and Garelli 2013. The line of inquiry goes back to Galinsky 1975: 68 (cf. Galinsky 1996: 265 and 1999: 104). For important comments on the *Metamorphoses* and pantomime dancing, see primarily Richlin 1992: 174; Hardie 2000: 429; Habinek 2002: 47, 52 and 53; Garelli 2007: 313, 354.

and was not at all limited to the text of ‘the true original copies’” (Orgel 2002: 30), a masterpiece such as Vergil's *Aeneid* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* included a large zone of instability and possibility. When Ovid calls libretti based on the *Metamorphoses* *mea poemata*; when Suetonius refers to a danced version of the *Aeneid*'s closing scene as Vergil's “Turnus”; or when Arnobius in the fourth century C.E. refers to a danced version of the *Trachiniae* plot as Sophocles' Trachiniae,¹⁵⁷ there is no solecism at stake. In fact, the cultural logic involved finds its best counterpart in the Restoration period of the Shakespearean stage, when the “concept” of each play was “never . . . limited to the original text,” so that, for example, both the radically revised Dryden/Davenant version of *The Tempest*, which remained the standard performing version until 1832, and the “scholarly text on the bookshelf of every literate household were Shakespeare's *Tempest*” (Orgel 2002: 245). Similarly, for the majority of participants in first century B.C.E. Roman culture both the version of the sixth *Eclogue* contained in Vergil's own *pagina* (cf. *Ecl.* 6.12) and the version performed by Volumnia Cytheris would have been aspects of the same work and would have answered to any call for “Vergil's *Eclogue*” without interpretative strain. In fact, we are at risk of serious misunderstanding of Roman Republican literary life if we are inclined to believe that a strain did exist. Once in circulation, every text would have been, theoretically at least, forever open to revision, a candidate for re-adjustment and re-configuration. Yet, a lingering thought persists. Could it be the case that Ovid's special circumstances have distorted the picture?

It can never be stressed strongly enough that adaptation and re-mediation would not have been the only game in town, even less a game everyone would have been thrilled to

¹⁵⁷ Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4.35: *Sophoclis in Trachiniis*.

play or even witness. Not every author would have welcomed the likelihood of his work being transposed into a different medium, especially a medium involving the stage. Horace feels the moment of publication, “the cutting of the umbilical cord” that turns *his* carefully protected text into *everybody's* easily accessible book, so fraught with anxiety that he sends off the *liber* of *Epistles* I with “an envoi *malgré soi*,”¹⁵⁸ the short *Epistles* 1.20. After its public release, the author knows “he can do very little to control its reception” or indeed prevent the book from “ending up in the wrong hands” (Oliensis 1995: 213), including (or perhaps primarily?) *prima donna* singer Tigellius' dirty paws, rummaging for and sweating over scrolls among the booksellers' stock (*Sat.* 1.4.71-72). In Horace's negative overall assessment, the fate of the *Eclogues* as reported by Servius and Suetonius / Donatus would have confirmed very neatly indeed his pessimistic take on “life after publication”: reared (cf. *Epist.* 1.20.5: *nutritus*) in the exclusive, learned company of those who can appreciate their sophisticated Hellenistic core, Vergil's miniature gems got “dirty” through contact with vulgar hands (cf. *Epist.* 1.20.11-12: *manibus sordescere uulgi | coeperis*) and ended up on stage—one of the worst conceivable forms of degradation: “or are you mad enough to prefer that your poems be repeated in worthless games?” (*an tua demens | uilibus in ludis dictari carmina malis?*, *Sat.* 1.10.74-5). A century down the line, when an irate Persius drives a wedge between the indiscriminate masses and the demanding, discerning audience his own poetry requires, it is low-brow works re-coded for the stage that he considers representative of vulgar tastes; empty-minded vulgarity is better served by brainless soaps in the mold of *Callirhoe*, served as entertainment “after lunch” (*Pers.* 1.134). True, the reference may be

¹⁵⁸ Oliensis 1995: 211 and 212.

to Chariton's novel *tout court*, but, in the spirit of Juvenal's contemptuous reference to Statius' *Agave* (see above), Persius may well be looking in the direction of trivial stage entertainment, such as a pantomime libretto based on Chariton's tear-jerking story.¹⁵⁹

Horace's abhorrence is (or rather ought to be) instructive and highly relevant to our reading of Servius on Vergil's sixth *Eclogue*. We keep on noting Horace's preference for the discerning reader over the vast tumultuous audience and his dislike of having his literary trifles return again and again (*iterum atque iterum*) to be watched in the theaters (*spectanda theatris*).¹⁶⁰ Yet this emphatic disjunction of Horace's own taste from the taste of others is only meaningful for us if we at least occasionally remember to flip the discarded side of the coin into prominence, namely his understanding of the “return” or repeat performance of the poetic product on the stage as not the exception but the rule. In the case of a non-dramatic poet's verses the very notion of being or becoming viewing

¹⁵⁹ According to Tilg 2010: 75 the reference to Chariton is widely accepted and “would have been motivated by the sudden appearance of a new form of literature which had no tradition as an art form and clearly catered to the ‘weak’ audience”. The *Commentum Cornuti*, a Carolingian compilation of ancient scholia on Persius, offers a variety of guesses (including the possibility that Callirhoe was a *pantomima*), but, as Tilg points out, a “constant in this jumble ... is that ‘Callirhoe’ is seen as something literary or subliterate” (*ibid.* 69) and “Persius' reference to the novel or something derived from it makes a good point in his satire” (*ibid.* 78). In the imperial East, novels such as *Metiochus and Parthenope* were certainly adapted into pantomime libretti, just as much as they also seeped into domestic art.

¹⁶⁰ Horace, *Sat.*1.10. 39.

matter for the public increases exponentially the possibility of some degree of adaptation, some re-calibration of the work towards a different point of reference, some effort to smoothe the transition from the authorial *canere* to the professional *cantare*.¹⁶¹ Apart from Ovid, the best counterbalancing act to Horace is provided by Pliny, who records as a matter of especial pride that, after their publication as a “little book” (*libellus*), his hendecasyllables are being re-calibrated for performance, *cantare* being the crucial term:

Postremo placuit exemplo multorum unum separatim hendecasyllaborum volumen absolvere, nec paenitet. Legitur describitur cantatur etiam, et a Graecis quoque, quos Latine huius libelli amor docuit, nunc cithara nunc lyra personatur.

¹⁶¹ The iterative of *canere* (sing), *cantare* underscores a different relation between the enunciator and the subject of his/her song. Both *canere* and its cognates, including *cantare* and *cantus*, “describe speech made special through the use of specialized diction, regular meter, musical accompaniment, figures of sound, mythical or religious subject matter, and socially authoritative performance context” (Habinek 2005: 61). However, while *canere* produces “song generated by the voice of a person with special access to sources of authority” (Habinek, *ibid.* 67), *cantare* designates the “mere repetition or re-performance of someone else’s authorizing performance” (*ibid.* 66). In other words, as Habinek has demonstrated meticulously (and in line with Quinn 1982 and Markus 2000), while *canit* is appropriate for the poet/composer of his own verse, *cantare* designates the imitative, second-order rendition of someone else’s self-authored text, meaning essentially to “sing a song or perform a poem composed by someone else” (Lowrie 2009: 19), the very range of activity attributed by Servius to Volumnia Cytheris.

Finally I decided to do as many authors have done and complete a separate volume of hendecasyllables; and I have never regretted this. My verses are read and copied, they are even sung, and set to the cithara or lyre by Greeks ¹⁶²who have learned Latin out of liking for my little book. (Pliny, *Ep.* 7.4. 8-10; Loeb trans. B.Radice 1969)

¹⁶² Does Pliny mean Greeks working in the performance industry, somehow affiliated to the “circuit of Greek games” which, as Hardie (1983: 23) notes, “[a]t its height in the early Empire ... must have comprised in excess of a hundred major and minor festivals, a great many of which will have included literary and musical events”? Starting precisely from Pliny's boast about his sung hendecasyllables, set to Greek musical performance, Johnson 2000 scrutinizes a Roman-era papyrus fragment from Yale's Beinecke Library (*PCtYBR* inv.4510) containing two Greek melic poems with running vocal musical notation. Although “pitched at the upper crust and the ‘wannabes’, and not at the bakers and fullers” (Johnson 2000: 59), the Yale papyrus, in consonance with a small group of musical papyri from the second or early third century C.E., affords most precious insights into a professional world of florid, dramatic musical style and melodramatic tone. Moreover, the papyrus' poetic fragments seem unrelated to canonical drama and leave open the possibility that they might “represent a category otherwise unknown to us” (Johnson 2000: 59) — pantomime style songs, dare we ask? Returning to Cytheris and Vergil's time, relevant is the *Graeca scaena* mentioned with great pride in a late-Republican Roman funerary inscription as the professional milieu of the deceased teenage dancer Licinia Eucharis (see Wiseman 1985a: 30-31).

As Parker (2009: 215) writes, “Notice the force of *etiam*: being read and being copied are the proofs of popularity; performance is an unexpected bonus.”¹⁶³ Not only does Pliny acknowledge the re-modeling of his work but he seems to revel in its openness and instability, in the non-finality of publication—to speak Bourdieu's language, this was a real “prise de position” in the Roman literary field, all the more interesting for us because it is shared by the scores of orators whom Tacitus' Messalla excoriates as shameless degenerates, boasting that ‘their speeches can be sung and danced to’ (*cantari saltarique commentarios suos*), as though that were a mark of ‘praise’, ‘fame’ and ‘genius’ (*Dial.* 26.3).

Does increased awareness of adaptation as an activity essential to the entertainment industry of Republican/Augustan Rome bring us closer to a solution regarding Cytheris' rendition of *Eclogue* 6? Once again, if it is certainty that we are after, it does *not* and it *can* not. There is, however, enormous and underexplored ‘capital’ in the very existence of conflicting valuations of the journey from original to second-order creativity such as we see it in Ovid, Horace, Pliny. Whatever we may choose to think of such differences, the inescapable truth is that they do presuppose a ferment, the presence rather than the

¹⁶³ Pliny's hendecasyllables, so enthusiastically received into the media of song and music, would have been the ones first announced as an *opusculum* in progress in *Ep.* 4.13.2 and subsequently sent to Plinius Paternus, with *Ep.* 4.14 acting as a cover letter. By Pliny's own admission, the volume could have been served just as well by the title of “epigrams, idylls, eclogues or little poems, which is the popular name” (*sive epigrammata sive idyllia sive eclogas sive, ut multi, poematia*) (*Ep.* 4.14.9), anything conveying their nugatory, trifling, ludic character.

absence of an immediate, palpable context for Servius' information. If the kind of story Servius tells was not an aberration — and this article has argued very strongly that it was not — it opens a window on cultural moments shared indiscriminately by all, without impermissible lines drawn between the 'high' and the 'low'; most importantly, it offers glimpses of a culture wherein 'popular' is not axiomatically synonymous with 'vacuous,' 'deprived of artistic merit.' Even if presented with a hefty dose of caution, it certainly does not deserve the ridicule that has been heaped on it and those who believe it.

§4. 'Cultural amphibians,' Cytheris and the rise of pantomime

What kind of 'players' in the Roman cultural scene were responsible for the re-coding of a literary work into a new set of conventions, paving the way for its wholesale mutation into a new presentational medium? Who, if any, were the 'middlemen' who facilitated the flow of material between 'higher' and 'lower,' élite poetic composition (or concentrated pockets of distilled élite knowledge, such as a mythological or love handbook) and the world of live performance? If such 'brokers' are no figment of scholarly imagination, can they be pulled out of their murky shadows? A handful of distinct clues, chronologically and culturally diverse, can be pressed into service to provide us with bearings in the absence of navigable waters.

In the first place there is an intriguing comment by Suetonius on the career of a certain Lucius Crassicius Pansa, an exceptionally learned school teacher-turned-commentator, whose career spanned the popular and the élite in the most spectacular fashion: having

started his professional career as a helper to mime writers,¹⁶⁴ he rose to the pinnacle of glory by prising the secrets of Cinna's *Zmyrna*, the notoriously erudite masterpiece that took nine years to compose and staked its fame, at least in part, upon its inaccessibility. According to Suetonius, Crassicius earned considerable renown by publishing a commentary on the *Zmyrna*.¹⁶⁵ Although the magnitude of this particular span, from the topmost to the bottom end of cultural production, is probably unique (hence caught Suetonius' attention), some involvement of rank-and-file *grammatici* (many of them Greek) in the *ars ludicra* of the stage may well have been routine.¹⁶⁶ Nothing can be proved, yet fascinating questions concerning the supply lines open to the world of commercial entertainment do arise thick and fast. John Jory's latest case study of

¹⁶⁴ Suetonius, *Gram.* 18.2: *hic initio circa scaenam versatus est dum mimographos adiuvat* ("At the start of his career he was active in the theater, assisting the writers of mimes"; trans. Kaster 1995: 23).

¹⁶⁵ Suetonius, *Gram.* 18.2; on Crassicius Pansa and his career see Wiseman 1985b.

¹⁶⁶ Kaster 1988: 35-50 is enlightening on the "ambiguous" (47) position of the grammarian, who rubs shoulders both with the more humble teacher of elementary letters and the provider of liberal education; in the first century B.C.E. especially, the process of the grammarians' gradual disengagement from "the great households to which they were formally tied as slaves and freedmen or on which as men of otherwise humble origin they were wholly dependent" (51) was not yet complete; the fact that such men were neither pre-eminent in social esteem nor hugely successful in financial terms makes it much more likely than not that they would have been willing to undertake 'behind the scenes' literary work in the service of a buoyant industry.

pantomime masks can serve us well as an example. An inscribed mask of an adult (as opposed to an infant) Astyanax found in Thessaloniki (dated 2nd century C.E.) points in two equally tantalizing directions. First the possible existence of learned professional librettists capable of mining the scholia tradition alongside obscure literary sources in order to locate variant versions of the Trojan legend, e.g. versions involving an Astyanax who *did* after all grow up to become king.¹⁶⁷ Second the possibility that someone (moon-lighting *grammatici* seeking to boost their earnings?) was on hand, or could be specially commissioned as and when the need arose, to do the preliminary work on behalf of a troupe's librettist. If we pay heed to Lucian's assertion (*Salt.* 31) that the plots of pantomime are more learned (πολυμαθέστεραι) compared to tragic ones, those in possession of literate education must have played an important part in the act of locating such plots or providing the raw material for their creation in the first place. The search for the unconventional or the lure of the obscure, the hidden or the unexpected can only be undertaken by those who know where and how to look.¹⁶⁸ In other words, 'mediators' like Crassicius, keeping one foot splashing in the murky waters of the popular while also breathing the rarefied air of the élite, would have been needed in order to sustain a process of transcribing parts of the élite's storehouse of archived knowledge or part of the

¹⁶⁷ Jory 2012: 197-98 locates alternative narratives going against the grain of the dominant "Astyanax thrown off the walls of Troy" tradition in ancient scholia on the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* (Servius), as well as in Dio Chrysostom and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

¹⁶⁸ Similar questions with respect to the feasibility of accessing material in the various Roman libraries have been asked by Horsfall 2016: 17-30.

élite's original creations into block-busting show-stoppers. To paraphrase Macrobius, their work would have involved the ferreting out of matters hidden in the 'innermost places' (*penetralibus*) of the literary tradition, details unknown to anyone but those who have drained (*hauserunt*) the cup of Greek learning to the bitter end.¹⁶⁹ Given his prior theatrical experience, did Crassicius ever adapt Cinna's *Zmyrna* into a form that could be danced?¹⁷⁰ If not, was he ever tempted to try? Or take the *grammatici* jostling for position in the race to produce commentaries on Tiberius' favorite Greek poets (including Parthenius and Euphorion):¹⁷¹ did they also exploit a market demand for similar stories on the dancing floor? To plot such professionals securely onto the graph of the pantomime industry's artistic network is an impossible task, given the paucity of our evidence. Yet we do happen to have a most interesting, securely attested connecting line: Statius, one of the two named Latin poets associated with the composition of libretti, was the son of a highly acclaimed professional poet and *grammaticus*,¹⁷² who started his career in that most fashionable of Campanian cities, the Greek city of Naples, wide open to Eastern artistic influence and seat of the illustrious Neapolitan Games which hosted the first

¹⁶⁹ See Macrobius 5.18.1, speaking of Vergil's erudition.

¹⁷⁰ Myrrha *did* become the subject of pantomime plots, certainly by Lucian's time (*Salt.* 58) but also earlier: see Josephus *AJ* 19.94 on *Cinyras* (Myrrha's father), the drama danced in Rome on the day of Gaius Caligula's assassination (41 C.E.)

¹⁷¹ See Suetonius, *Tib.* 70.2 (= Parthenius T3 Lightfoot).

¹⁷² On the broader cultural context in which Statius' father operated as a poet and teacher, see Hardie 1983: 2-36.

pantomime competition in the West (Lucian, *Salt.* 32). Do some at least of the puzzle's many pieces start falling into place?

Second, there is Lucian's baffling stipulation concerning the range of cognitive expertise required of the accomplished, professional dancer:

ἔτι δὲ κριτικὸν τε ποιημάτων καὶ αἰσμάτων καὶ μελῶν τῶν ἀρίστων
 διαγνωστικὸν καὶ τῶν κακῶς πεποιημένων ἐλεγκτικόν. (*Salt.* 74)

in addition (he has to be) a critic of poems and songs and able to discern the best of tunes and find out those which are badly made.

The language is typical of Lucian's strategy in this sophisticated 'apology' of pantomime dancing, penned in the middle of the second century C.E., most probably in Antioch.

Lavished liberally upon the dance in an attempt to enmesh it in networks of legitimate cultural expression is the intellectual armory of orators and sophists— cultural trappings which, in reality, neither the genre nor its artist would have comfortably worn.¹⁷³ How should we understand *poëmatôn kai aismatôn kritikon* in this particular juncture? Lucian cannot have meant to attribute to the dancer expertise in the kind of poetic criticism that was an integral part of the art of grammar and included the pronouncement of definitive judgement (*krisis*) over 'healthy' and unsound expressions or the distinction of genuine from spurious works (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 1.93). Nor could he be claiming for the dancer the practice of literary criticism, *krisis poiëmatôn* (criticism of poetry), an activity performed by the "critic" (*kritikos*), whose deep learning and comprehensive knowledge of language makes him as superior to the grammarian as a master craftsman

¹⁷³ See Lada-Richards 2007: esp. 81-87, 98-103, 130-34.

(ἀρχιτέκτων) is superior to a servant (ὑπηρέτης).¹⁷⁴ However, rejecting the comment altogether as meaningless, ridiculous hyperbole is not the answer either. What Lucian is really telling us, albeit in a heavily glossed-over manner, is that a dancer at the top of his game (more realistically speaking the leader of the troupe or the one financially responsible for the troupe) needs to have a knack for sourcing out the most stage-friendly subject matter, *ariston* in the sense of ‘most congenial’ to corporeal expressiveness, most likely to ‘travel’ well and thrive in the journey from the page to the stage, most appropriate for a series of re-mediations. This is most probably what the Elvis Presley of Horace's time, the crooner Hermogenes Tigellius, would have been after when thumbing with sweaty fingers, to the poet's dismay, poetry advertised in bookshops: material to sing or adapt and sing, material to set to music (*Sat.* 1.4.71-72). Tigellius would have been at the uppermost end of what Feeney (2009: 25) calls the “babel of hybrid lowlife professionals,” an élite poet's “‘unideal’ readers” who can ultimately “make of him what they will”: imitate, plagiarise, distort, misunderstand him, turn his work into material for chanting, singing, dancing. Whether the *mima* Cytheris herself was in the business of selecting “the best” of *poemata*, *asmata* and *melê* and transposing them in accordance with her needs there is no way of knowing. As far as Vergil's *Eclogue* is concerned, however, on the basis of its successful airing in a recitation context, adapters would have been all the more eager to consider it as a prime virtuoso piece, a candidate for vocal and corporeal pyrotechnics.

¹⁷⁴ Sext. Emp. *Math.* 1.79, the opinion being attributed to Crates of Mallus. See further Asmis 1992.

Given pantomime and mime's secure hold on the attention of Roman audiences, the need of sourcing the most appropriate material for transcoding into the stage's primarily corporeal idioms must have been constantly pressing. Some periods in Roman cultural history, however, must have experienced a higher than normal confluence between literary and stage matter. For example, Persius' biting satire (P. 1, esp. 3-7) of Rome's wholesale 'Trojanification' targets a trend manifesting itself with every upstart poet falling in with the crowd, cashing in on the general "crush of enthusiasm for all things Iliadic" (Freudenburg 2001: 155). Given Nero's own twin obsessions (a) with performance¹⁷⁵ and (b) with the destruction of Troy,¹⁷⁶ the fad in question may well have included, besides Attius Labeo's lamentable Homeric translations,¹⁷⁷ sung or danced adaptations of Trojan themes on stage. Can we postulate any comparable reason for an increased need for stage-bound material in Vergil's time, material of the kind that Cytheris could have conceivably performed? Once again speculation will have to run ahead of any evidence. We do, however, have one incredibly important handle on the matter in the guise of Maecenas, the agent with the greatest pulling power in his contemporary art world. One of his 'grand passions' was his own freedman Bathyllus (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.54.2), the vanguard artist who, alongside Pylades, made of dance an

¹⁷⁵ Very selectively on Nero *scaenicus*, see Edwards 1994; Bartsch 1994:1-62; Champlin 2003: esp. 53-83; Nerveghna 2007: 31-36.

¹⁷⁶ See, e.g., Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.58; Dio Cass. 62.29.1 (Nero reciting from his *Troica* ["Trojanic Tales"] at the Neronia of 65 AD); see Freudenburg 2001: 154-58.

¹⁷⁷ See Persius 1.4-5 and 50-51; other than Persius' scornful dismissal, we know next to nothing about him.

ambitious commercial enterprise as well as a powerful aesthetic statement. For an emergent art form, pantomime was exceptionally fortunate. Not only did it enjoy what Bourdieu (1993: 51) calls the principle of “popular” legitimacy, that is to say “the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the ‘mass audience’”; being Maecenas' and Augustus' favorite, it also enjoyed the “consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class” (Bourdieu 1993: 51)— or rather, in this case, what was even *hors* class, beyond compare, the Emperor himself. As the winner of the popular vote, so to speak, pantomime was already an eminently attractive bet for genuine artists eager for their work to catch fire with the wider public just as much as for commercial hacks of all denominations willing to buy into any trend for as long as it sells. The hefty dose of legitimation provided by the politically powerful (as opposed to the intellectual) arbiters of taste in the last decades of the first century B.C.E. must have given a substantial boost to the value of the pantomime stock: small risk investment in exchange for increased visibility and, in case of real success, a chance of getting closer to the magic circle, the inner group of Maecenas himself.¹⁷⁸ Any shrewd and savvy fashion-tracker would have been quick to realise that the imperially favored pantomime formula was capable of changing anyone's investment into gold —providing Bathyllus with plots

¹⁷⁸ Note how the ‘pest’ desperate to secure Horace's help in order to break into Maecenas' inner circle flags his prowess in singing and dancing (*Sat.* 1.9.24-25) among a set of qualifications that could recommend him to the great man himself.

(cf. §3), creating a singing-and-dancing version of the sixth *Eclogue*¹⁷⁹ were simply different ways of buying into the pantomime dream, the jazz mania of the day!

Is there any particular reason for thinking of the sixth *Eclogue* in relation to the emerging form of pantomime dancing? With a mythological core — Silenus' song— comprising some of pantomime's as well as neoteric poetry's most popular thematic clusters, namely metamorphosis and illicit, tortured love,¹⁸⁰ the sixth *Eclogue* constitutes

¹⁷⁹ In the early, possibly pre-Augustan phase of pantomime's development, performers, according to Lucian (*Salt.* 30) both danced and sang.

¹⁸⁰ Tales of love and/or metamorphosis in the sixth *Eclogue*: Pyrrha's stones (41); Hylas (43-44); Pasiphae (45-60), “one of the most lurid examples of Hellenistic interest in the violent and unnatural power of tragic eros” (Stewart 1959: 189); the daughters of Proetus (48-51, as an “inset”); Phaethon's sisters (62-63); Scylla, daughter of Megarian Nisus (74-77); Tereus, Procne and Philomela (78-81); Hyacinthus or (with Knox 1990) Daphne (82-84). In the case of pantomime, metamorphosis held for centuries a very special position in the genre's thematic repertoire. For Lucian the shape-shifting Proteus is the figurehead of the genre (*Salt.* 19), while the aspiring dancer himself is required to master a repertoire that includes “the totality of mythical metamorphoses (τὰς μυθικὰς μεταμορφώσεις ἀπάσας), as many as have been changed into trees or beasts or birds and those women who turned from female to male, I mean Caeneus and Teiresias and their like” (*Salt.* 57; cf. *Salt.* 59, special emphasis on Zeus' metamorphoses in the course of his erotic escapades). Cf. *Lib. Or.* 64.56, *Arn. Adv. nat.* 4.35, 7.33; August. *De civ. D.* 7.26, 18.10; *Sid. Apoll. Carm.* 23. 281–97; *Prudent. Perist.* 10. 221–27. Love stories was the second mainstay of pantomimic repertoires until the end of pagan antiquity. Ovid tells

remarkably fertile ground for the hosting of an intermedial cross-over between poetry and dance.¹⁸¹ If any poem in the forties could have been considered *ariston* for pantomime-style theatricalization, with a melodramatic economy of high-points and a subjective, personal voice on display, the sixth *Eclogue* would certainly have fitted the bill to the full,¹⁸² especially given the fact that in the early phase of pantomime dancing pastoral

us that “fabled lovers are constantly portrayed in dancing” (*illic adsidue ficti saltantur amantes*) (*Rem. Am.* 755), but so do Christian authors from the fourth, fifth and sixth century C.E. See, e.g., Cyprian, *Don.* 8; Augustine, *Ep.* 91.5, Jacob of Serugh, *Homily* 5, F21v^a and 22v^b; cf. Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* 4.35, 7.33; Sid. Ap. C. 23.281-97. See further Lada-Richards 2007: 71-72.

¹⁸¹ The Hellenistic/neoteric imprint of the sixth *Eclogue* is amply recognized; displaying “[e]very mark of Alexandrian treatment” (Stewart 1959: 190), it derives its sense of unity from the characteristically neoteric subjects of metamorphosis and love (see Coleman 1977: 204); the themes of Silenus' song in particular are “typical of Parthenius' interests, whether in the extant anthology of the *Erotica Pathemata* or the lost *Metamorphoses*” (Harrison 2007: 49), Silenus himself replicating “Parthenius' actual role in literary history, forming a crucial conduit between the Roman poets of the mid-first century BC and the great Hellenistic poetry of Alexandria” (Harrison 2007: 48). Apart from the fully extant Catullus C. 64, Calvus' *Io*, Cornificius' *Glaucus* and Cinna's *Zmyrna* are some of the most securely documented examples of neoteric mythological predilections.

¹⁸² Out of the stories in Silenus' thematic catalogue, the majority are documented pantomime subjects: cosmogony (*Luc. Salt.* 37), Deucalion and Pyrrha (*Salt.* 39),

themes constituted a distinct branch of pantomime entertainment, favored and cultivated by Bathyllus himself and involving such quintessentially ‘bucolic’ characters as Pan and the Satyrs or the Theocritean figure of a pastoral Cyclops.¹⁸³

I will end this article in the way it began, with a reference to T. S. Eliot. Responding to three different portrayals of Shakespeare published in close succession, Eliot (1932 [1927]: 107) wrote:

About any one so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.

In the case of Vergil it is equally or even more probable “that we can never be right.” But if we were to read Cytheris' performance as an illustration of the cultural norm instead of an improbable exception, we would at least have changed our way of getting it wrong. And, as Eliot (*ibid.*) concludes, “it is certain that nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error.” Whatever the ultimate verdict, there is much to be learnt from this process too. Whichever way one chooses to interpret the scanty evidence presented here, I have tried to show that between Servius' anecdote on Cytheris' stage-act and the cultural experience of the first century B.C.E. there is no sign of rupture or discontinuity, no break. ‘Taking Servius seriously’ entails first and foremost the refusal to accept, as Levine (1988: 252) put it,

Pasiphae (*Salt.* 49), Phaethon's sisters (*Salt.* 55), Tereus and Philomela (*Salt.* 40), Scylla (*Salt.* 41).

¹⁸³ See Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.63 (**above, p. x**); cf. Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.124-25. On Bathyllus' speciality in bucolic love tales see Plut. *Mor.* 711e-f.

the conviction that culture cannot come from the young, the inexperienced, the untutored, the marginal; the belief that culture is finite and fixed, defined and measured, complex and difficult of access, recognizable only by those trained to recognize it, comprehensible only to those qualified to comprehend it.

Moreover, taking Servius seriously is also tantamount to redefining our understanding of the world of professional stage artists and their area of expertise as profoundly interconnected with the world of poets. At the very least I hope that the present piece will help reduce the amount of “opportunism” which, as Don Fowler (1997: 75) wrote some 20 years ago, dogs the use of Servius' Vergilian commentary: Servius' readings are “quoted if they support an interpretation, ignored if they do not.” Although in the case of Servius' scholion on *Ecl.* 6.11 we are dealing with an anecdote rather than the grammarian's philological dissection of a line, the charge of using him “opportunistically” has never been more apt.

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